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THE WILDERNESS

G. H. DE LA VERGNE

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THE WILDERNESS

A BATTLE PICTURE

BY

GEORGE H. DE LA VERGNE

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DEDICATED

TO MY FATHER

GEORGE DE LA VERGNE

LIEUT.-COL. 8TH TENNESSEE VOLUNTEERS

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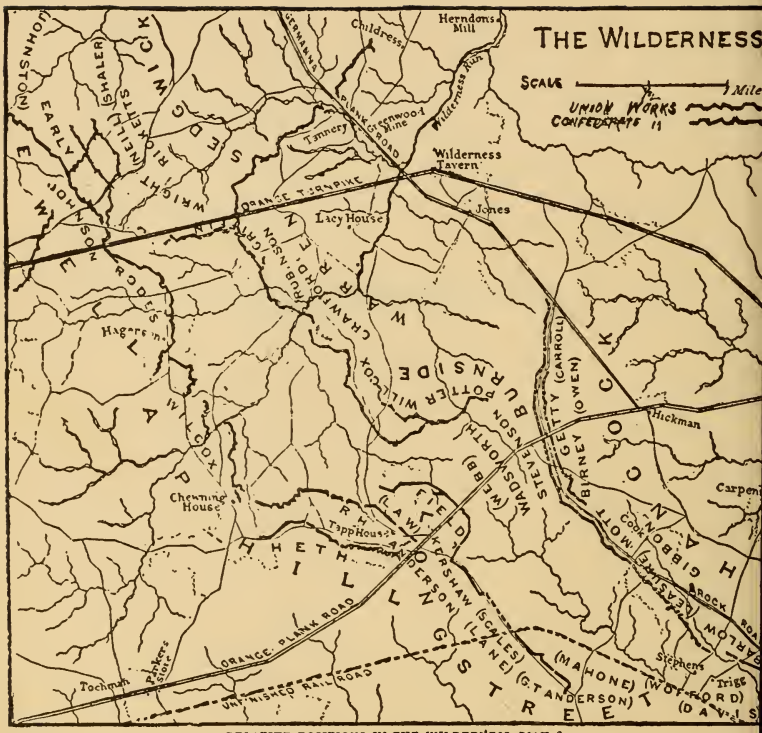
THE WILDERNESS



RELATIVE POSITIONS IN THE WILDERNESS, MAY 6.

AFFIRMATION

Where stand I in this welter of the world?
With Thee O Christ, who speak I for? for
Thee
Naught else is possible, Thou hast the words
Of eternal life, and thru the weakness of
My flesh Thy word runs keen in cleansing
power
And by Thy blood my sinful soul is pure.
Whilst thru the Holy Spirit, centered deep,
The body radiates an influence mild,
Pervasive so unlike in nature, and
In power from force electric, vibrations
Coarse, and the soul illumines; thru its light
The corporate atoms are influsedwith life
Tranquilizing blood in arteries and veins
And the last sensitive filament of nerves,
Thus human flesh is freed from foul obsessions,
In texture like unto a child's again.
And by the Spirit man's unhampered soul

Becomes attuned to higher harmonies.
Throughout this world thy sacrifice, O Christ,
Is ever present and Thy triumph too,
For Thou art God; Thou walkest thru reality;
Thy steps I follow up that narrow path,
Solid beneath my feet, it never sinks
In sand, not seeming solid like to those
That fool the feet, Thy path divides the world,
And leads not to a palace but a fold
For sheep, strange beasts without, O God, how they
Devour, how strange these symbols mild and poor,
Good Shepherd, sheep and lambs, in such a world.
Amidst a moiling pack of savage beasts
What chance have we? Thou knowest, yet in fact
These symbols are but half the truth, behold
Thy spirit conquered from the cross, from whence
Thine affirmation, love and truth o'er came
And is triumphant, drawn from sources deep,
Aye deeper, than our access, whilst like yeast

Thy life hath levitated with its power
The weight and stubborn substance of our world.

. . . . . .

Now thru the choking murk when ends the evil
Of this world, straight we hold our steadfast way
With hands that grip the rope of Faith, and then
In sudden beauty, what was vision once
Is changed to reality, and what was real
Becomes a dream that lies upon the far
Horizon like a cloud, once ominous
That after storm robbed of its menace, shines
In roll of white and silver, then is gone.

PROLOGUE

LEE'S Signal Mountain gave a far flung
view,
North West Virginia stretched before his
sight;
Mid afternoon it was in brilliant glow
Of early Spring, a glamorous circle cut,
Fair, far horizons, varied foothills formed
Below the Blue Ridge, rising as a dream
Of cloudy grandeur, thence the circle swept
The low green levels of Manassas Plain;
The reaches of the upper Rappahannock;
Then past the misty heights of Fredericks-
burg,
And next the country channeled by the
streams,
The Mat-Po-Ny, North Anna and the South
Her sister, then the circle curved complete
South of Gordonsville, thence the rugged
range

Of hills tapered towards the River, all
This section, peaceful, dreaming in the light
That spoke of coming harvests, not the kind
Of War's black reaping; on that tender breast
Of fair Virginia were the talon marks
Of former battles, Fredericksburg, the curse
Of Chancellorsville, and westward on the plain,
Manassas, now a brood of bitterer battles
Was being hatched. The Confederate chieftain
Paid but scant heed to all this beauty spread
Beneath his gaze,—the Rapidan a glaze
Of glittering silver wound thru woods and hills,
Lee scanned with searching glass, a scene beyond
The River, where, upon the plain around
Culpeper Court House was a vast armed camp,
Long miles of tents in order, and huge parks
Of packed artillery, a camp aside

Thousands of horses,—there it was in power,
The Army of the Potomac, and like
A giant stretched its limbs from winter sleep,
Fast rousing, Lee made note of all these signs
With eye long practiced, then he stood deep mersed
In thought, a figure poised in perfect power
Devoid of pose, in garb of fitting gray,
Three stars of gold on collar close about
The throat, a head whose high perfection glowed
Serene, in radiation of sub-conscious power,
No impressment, coördination both
Of body, soul and mind, a Prince of God,
A Christian man, who felt the present force,
And motion of the Spirit, very source
Of poise and power and peace, conjoined with love;
Yet human, moved by winds of scorching wrath,
And there he stood the great American,
In breadth of mind and spirit unapproached,
In all our History; from distance drew
His glance to scan that dark terrain below

To the westward, where wound the River's
course.
Then Lee spoke to his staff "Gentleman,
Grant
Will cross the fords of the Rapidan
To interpose between this army and
Richmond," some there, dissented, but Lee
held
His opinion, for a moment gazed in thought
Toward that dark blotch of woods which
never takes
The light, but always sullen, History terms
The Wilderness,—south from the River's
ford
A region black with pines, enmeshed in
brush,
Rived with ravines, and pocked with ugly pits
Of iron excavations, red with rust.
As Lee observed this scene, a shade sar-
donic
Darkened his eyes, brown, luminous, not
soft,
He saw the enemy come stumbling to his
doom,
In that deep jungle reinforcing with
Its aid, and worth an army corps, and more
To his depleted force.

Let us turn to that other army stretched
For miles around Culpeper Court House, yet
'Tis not its power I sing, nor of its pomp;
In all that vast army I see one tent
Scarce different from the others wherein sits
Sideways to a camp table stretched with maps
A man, with figure slightly slouched, brown beard,
Cigar tight clipped in wide slit mouth, the man
Ulysses Grant, three stars of silver shine
On narrow velvet of his shoulder straps;
A commander fit in temperament and mind,
For service in the war of nations, where
War was a business deprived of fuss
And feathers, science joined to will, and cold
To all emotion, this impassive one
Seemed neither young nor old, unkindled, gray
In tone, he drew on sources deep, submerged,
Of which he was in part not conscious, as,
An iceberg shows one-tenth its size above
The sweep and chop of restless seas, this man

Likewise gave scarce a hint of depths below.
In brilliant background shone victorious
names,
Fort Henry, Donelson, Vicksburg, then back
To Tennessee, and Chattanooga's field.
He pondered now the way to meet this Lee,
Who had so often smacked defeat against
This army that Grant was sent to chaperone
Against marauders bold, to Richmond town.
Three plans of action placed upon the map
Clearly defined, to meet the General's
choice:
The first to transfer his great army down
The large waterways straight to Richmond's
gates,
This was McClellan's method, promised
much;
The second plan to march by the right
flank
Beyond Lee's Signal Mountain, sectors
marked
By open country, where the larger force
Could spread with wide manœuvres to its
end;
The middle course to march across the
fords
Of Rapidan into the deep wilderness,

With hope to get Lee on the hip and keep
Between his army and his Richmond base.
Grant's balanced choice might well be said
to hide,
In one of three carved caskets, silver, gold
Or brutal lead, Will Shakespeare worked
this scheme,
As you remember, now in one there sleeps
Our Lady of Victory, bright in pictured
mold.
This suitor was not gay nor touched with
fire
Of fierce impatience, calmly brooded, then
Short nodded to his servant Fate to ope'
The leaden casket, turned and briefly wrote
An order for the army, straight to march
By fords across the Rapidan and through
The wilderness, instructing Gen. Meade,
"Lee's Army is your objective, where he
goes,
You go," signed U. S. Grant, Lieutenant-
General.
This done, he turned to take a jug,
supposed
To be within his trunk, not there, he stood
Emotionless, then turned and lifted the flap
and strode

Outside, hand in pocket, cigar clipped
Atilt in corner of his thin-lipped mouth,
He never even said "damn that Rawlins,"
His aide and old-time friend from Illinois,
Who strove with all his strength, and as a friend,
To hold Grant back from drink, his only vice,
The little rum black imp that dogged his steps;
His nature seemed inert, an idol blank
Of monolythic stone, unless aroused,
By stimulus of battle or of rum;
This spoils the picture but it speaks the truth.

THE WILDERNESS

CLOSE on the Ides of March, black marked of old
With blood of Cæsar, doomed to sudden death!
Two armies, Grant's and Lee's, were stretched at length,
One north, one south, of the wide Rapidan;
And as the weeks of Spring did broaden down
Toward the Summer, these great armies took
Real semblance, Grant's became an Eagle, wings
Slow rising, pulsed with fury, and the threat
Of coming battle, northward stretched, the tail
Along the railroad towards the junction point,

Manassas, southward in that jungle called,
The Wilderness, crouched low a tiger lean
With lashing tail that stirred the dust around
The white of Orange Court House where appeared
Its master, ready to cut the leash that held
The Army of Northern Virginia, what
A formal name for such a beast, inflamed
With furious hunger waiting for its kill.
You scarce discern it as it wends along
Or stops within the jungle, camouflaged
By sun and shadow, then it crouches, comes
The noise of crashing brush, then lurches thru
The bush, a huge blue elephant with trunk
Trumpeting the winds of Wrath, a Mahout small
Rides on the massive neck, nor deigns to beat
The swaying head, his weapon but a stick
Whittled to smallness, can this little man
Ride out the storm? That tale must soon be told.
Released the tiger springs, a catapult
Of hate, missing the head he tears the flank

To shreds of crimson, rends the other side,
The creature sways, now shall it fall to lie
Inert upon the jungle? no, for look!
That idol of a man is roused, he speaks,
Few gutteral words to those great ears and strikes
That gray round boulder of a head, thus stung
It clears, whilst thru its body runs, renewed,
A force galvanic from that man who gave
No outward sign of power, ungestured, grim,
But with a will to Victory; roused the beast
Shakes off the tiger, crushing down, one leg,
Beneath its ponderous tread, trumpets in rage
And lumbers thru the forest with intent
To get between the tiger and his lair;
That creature licks his wounds, just for a moment,
Then moves in swiftness parallel to course
Of its opponent, soon these two will meet
At Spottsylvania, there we can not go
The Wilderness our meat, and then 'tis known
(That papers scarce and publishers are too,

Alas! they like not power, unheralded,
Since all afflatus must be caused to blow
Thru standard tubes of penny whistles made
By them to toot some tinny tunes, at least
So seems Farewell, oh Persiflage, 'tis time)
To take our line of March, come muse, lead on
I follow, so must you, on dit, let's go,
Near drew the time decisive, yet it seemed
All Nature was attuned to pleasant peace,
Impossible that acrid smoke like fumes from hell
Should choke the air, and raucous yells of hate,
Unhuman cries of anguish, soon would stab,
White scar, intensely burn the gentle waves
Of ether musical, whereon the sun
Ripples its harmonies to hearts attuned;
Air tinctured with fragrance of coming Spring
Caused soon to stink with sulphur and the smell
Of sourish blood, once salted with the glow
Of human life, impossible and yet
The hours were gliding smoothly towards the dawns

Of days so terrible, that thru after years
Brave men and seasoned in the arts of war
Averted thoughts and memories from that sound,
"The Wilderness." Upon an evening mild,
Near fourth of May, when verged the midnight hour,
Two columns garbed in uniform of blue,
Some miles in length and several miles apart
Were set toward the fords of the Rapidan
Awaiting the signal! Meade's command to cross
At Germanna Ford nearest to Lee, therefore
To southward, this composed of Warren's Fifth,
And Sedgwick's Sixth corps and cavalry and guns
In true proportion, Hancock's second corps
To cross at Ely's Ford five miles below.
Half way between these two another Ford,
Culpeper Mine, reserved for wagon trains,
That trundled by like fat old women, heads
Encased in poke-bonnets white and new,
Soon grimed with smoke and dust of harsh campaigns.

The columns guarding their maternal forms
Filled with supplies and fodder for the troops.
'Twas fit precaution since that, gallant Stewart
Might be hovering near to thrust his gay
Attentions on these ladies huge, abduct
Them for his men in whirlwind fashion, such
His ways! a fence enclosed their rendezvous
Of spikes, sabres of Sheridan's and points
Of bayonets, detailed from other corps—,
Queen bees they were unique in value, when
Attacked quite helpless, so were guarded close.
The fighting columns were two lances tipped,
Sharp points of cavalry, with infantry
As fibred shaft and balanced at the end
With batteries of the guns, then duly poised
And hurled, with hope, perchance, to pierce and pin
The swift elusive tiger of Lee's force.
What thought these thousands as they stood at rest
Awaiting the order that would unlock
The gates of Hazard, opening on a world

Alien in aspect to the world of peace—,
High Victory and certain anguish, some
There were who felt a premonition cold
Like chilling lead, alas to be realized,
A feeling not to be explained, from air
That seems a vacancy, but is alive
With forces that our eyes can ne'er behold.
These soldiers were in fact mere boys, who gave
No heed, and little thought, to coming fate,
Though just a step ahead, above the lines.
Low stretched a yellow fog, of bawdy speech
Concerning women, this low mist was lit
With curses common as the air they breathed.
"Say Bill, you 'member that fat nigger wench
"Jake had in Washington, he likes 'em black."
"Oh Hell," says Jake, "she was to bring me luck."
So ran the talk, but different were the thoughts
Of others, underneath this scale and scurf
Of common talk the average of that man's
Army was straight; a clean backbone that naught

Could bend; how else was the Republic
saved?
But as happens often, the rotten few
Stunk up the air, for other men to breathe.
In justice must we note that in this war
There was no carnival of rape as mars
With black iniquity, the horrid trail
Of conquering armies, officers and men
Were set against such outrage, Grant though
calm
And patient, struck this crime with savage
force,
A man who raped a woman got short shift
At his command, in this the spirit showed
Of all his armies, so much for preface.
Upon the touch of twelve there snapped the
brief
Command, that roused those columns though
apart
To jointed action, a rhythmic python seems,
Stretching, interminable, its movement
wrapt
In sheltering darkness which is ever tinged
With mystery and the lure of the unseen,
From dimmed horizons; on these columns
moved
Toward the Fords that split the Rapidan,

And dawn revealed these marching hosts, dust hazed;
First jaunty cavalry with men and horse
Clean limbed, alert, the leaders cloaked in blue,
The troops by guidons marked, a brilliant show
To cause Mars' brutal front to light with pride,
Next miles of infantry loose jointed with
The clanking batteries, thus a River formed
Of steel and flowing on with steady, strong
Propulsion from the distance down across
The dark pontoons, and there the wilderness
Received and swallowed; looking back one saw
A constant sheen of light, in keenness flung
From bayonets bent slight in perfect tilt
Above a marching army, to the eye
As piercing as the notes of bugles blown
Unto the ear, the peak of martial thrill.
Lee's mounted scouts, trig-shaped, alert, keen scanned
Thru glasses set, then moving on, and yon,
The Army of the Potomac, their watch
Was from a knoll half sheltered by the green

Of graceful trees, then as the iron hoofs
Of Sheridan's first chargers struck the stream,
In glittering fans that splashed their tarnished chests,
Lee's scouts gray garbed, remembering well this foe,
In high good humor whirled their eager mounts,
With sneering comments on this western Grant,
Who like some others dared to beard their chief,
The master in his own terrain, then up
The turnpike dimmed with tender shade, galloped
Towards Headquarters. Lee was holding back
His hounds of war, his was the master hand,
Until the Wilderness should trip and sprawl.
His cumbrous foe and when entangled, then
Those gaunt gray beasts of his would tear and rend
As on the haunted field of Chancellorsville.
South of the River was his chosen ground,
Prestige was Lee's, a mind sagacious, strong,
Serenely glowing thru his splendid frame,

A unity of purpose joined with power,
A nature finely tempered for its ends,
With martial character of fibered strength,
Long trained in bitter battles where he took
The measure of the Northern chieftains save
Only Meade, now opposed by Grant, a man
Unemphasized in manner and in mind,
Unwarlike, mild, whose neutral tint concealed
A will to Victory, such, no furnace heat
Of battle could e'er melt as fluid to
Some other mold than his set purpose,—this,
The United States, his country one and not
Divided by this rending treason, this his will
Attained despite long weeks of horror, whilst
His hand unshaken guided straight the plow
Whose share of steel with cutting slowness turned
One long black furrow filled, with dead men's bones.
Throughout that fourth of May, two lines of blue

Poured into the engulfing wilderness,
Midway between them passed the rumbling trains,
Of snug trimmed wagons, sometimes overturned,
Their road a wood trail so they rocked from stumps,
To ruts, their tops as sails on heavy seas.
Before the reader's mind must clear be set
The region and the plan of battle, else
We are lost within a jungle and dismayed.
A map's a skeleton with roads for bones,
Full streams for arteries and the branching veins
Of rivulets and runs, back bone of hills,
The brown of hairy woods and all endowed
With meaning, and by imagination clothed.
Most conflicts have their tell-tale marks and brands,
Vicksburg, the river, Gettysburg, its hills.
The Wilderness the battle of the roads.
From Lee's Headquarters twenty miles away,
There branched two highways, one was called
The Orange Court House Pike; its course did run

Nearest the River, whilst its brother named
The Orange Plank of marked plebeian tread
To carry wagons through soft swampy ground,
Ran roughly parallel unto the Pike,
Both pierced the wilderness and were one mile,
Then two apart; south from Germanna Ford
A Turnpike skirted the northern fringe
Of battle and the wilderness, it cut
The Orange Turnpike near the Wilderness
Tavern but crossed, the Orange Court House Plank
Outside of bounds as one might say, its sphere
Important, the chief feeder of the fight,
Mark well the final highway called the Brock,
Its common color changed to one of blood,
It wanders up from Spottsylvania, marked
By Todd's old Tavern, intersected here
By the Catharpin Road, by Hancock used
Upon the morrow, on it goes three miles,
Entering the jungle, later cuts the Plank
Then on a mile it cuts the feeder road,
The Germanna Turnpike, forming thus
A tendon, twixt these two, thus have I placed

These rude stringers on which to build the fight;
But better yet compared to crosses set,
One crosspiece formed for both, the northern road
Germanna, roughly two uprights are nailed
Against it, one the Plank, the other known
The Pike, here on the morrow two armies nailed
In crucifixion, dying for the Right
In fierce sincerity. There yet remains
One way, that lurks half hidden thru the fringe
Of this terrain, with strange importance marked,
Poor second cousin of the battle roads,
The bed of a half finished railroad, mark!
It ran as proper, thru the farm of one
Miss Billion, more Mr. Billions have been made
In railroads, too half finished, here is hid
A fossil tale, I give ingredients, mix
It for yourself, Bright Prospectus framed
By Colonel Sellers, in the wilderness
Shall bloom the Iron Mines of richest ore,
Great vulcan what a dream of wealth right here

Unfolds,—a railroad built shall carry ore
Down to the River, the River to the sea, Alas
Never to be, that road an outcast lurked
A villain in the brush whom Longstreet used
Upon the second day to thrust a knife
Into the Federal side, it shirks along
Its hidden way a quarter of a mile
Below, and parallel unto the Plank
Until it neared the Brock, then scooted wide,
Southeast towards the farm of Stephen Triggs.
Look out! old Stephen or you'll lose some chicks,
This fellow, sure a villain mighty sly.
The foci of the battle must be marked;
Working together, let us place a few
Red buoys to show above the jungle waves
The channels of conflict; first is set,
The Wilderness Tavern near junction formed
Of the Orange Turnpike and Germanna Road
This buoy indicates the northwest sector; Grant's
Headquarters, let us mark with smaller buoy

What color? blue? your choice my friend,—
its place
Above a sparse pine knoll on Lacy's farm,
Just south of the Germanna, to the west,
The Orange Turnpike; East a mile the
Brock,
Due north a half a mile the Tavern stood;
Two miles southeast across the tangled
woods,
The heart of the grim wilderness where more
Than one Federal unit was to trip and fall,
Let's mark Lee's station, gray with golden
stars,
The Widow Tapp's just west from off the
Plank,
A mile from where this road adjoins the
Brock;
Two miles along the Plank to south we
reach
The place called Parker's store, here float a
buoy
To mark the furthest limit of the south
Sector, the north a Tavern and the south a
store
Reversing symbols, for this fight correct,
Lee's short resources made him quick and
keen

To strike a bargain, Grant was forced to use
Strong stimulants of reinforcing troops
To boost his fading line; this Parker's store
A name to conjure with throughout those days,
To rouse to high endeavor those who sought
Its proud possession, just a country store
Of weather boards, unpainted since the days
Of President Polk, behind its dusty panes
Were sample goods, and calicos, and toys,
Outside a hitching rail deep gnawed, and holes
Dug out by stamping horses, plagued with flies
Swarming specks gauze fluttering in the sun,
It was from Parker's ebbed the first advance
Of Union troops, thereafter it remained
Beyond the Federal grasp as though a chasm
Intervened, so their eyes denied a glimpse
Of that emporium, there stood in brush
Twixt Plank and Pike the varying units, and

With lifted muzzles bayed towards Parker's
store;
First Crawford, Wadsworth next, then last
and least
Ambrosial Burnside, these in turn would rise
And point towards Parker's, snuff the tainted
breeze
Then take direction marked as exit, save
Wadsworth, although mauled and mangled,
fearless fought,
He reaped a soldier's death, a living name.
Now friend, you've rested while I talked, 'tis
time
To finish up our task; from Parker's store
Retrace our steps two miles, past Widow
Tapp's
A name of humor fit for Shakespeare's
muse,
One mile beyond we mark the junction
formed
Of Plank and Brock, with buoy of flaming
red
Symbolic, here the waves of battle rose
To surges maddened by the roaring rush
Of fierce cross currents, forming whirlpools
black
Above the crossing of the roads,—your task

My friend is done, but mine continues, when
The battle joins stick close upon my heels,
Your guide, who megaphones each passing phase.
How strange and weird is war's impressment, takes
The petty name of some poor hamlet, farm,
Some tavern dinged for paint, obscure crossroads
And holds them in its flame, then brands the minds
Of men forever with black lettered names.
Great battles flashing out with sudden glare
Of green-white brilliance from oblivion bring
A hill, or mountain, tavern, or a store;
One vividness of light, then darkness dazed
From contrast but, upon the eye is stamped
The image of these objects for all time.
This is the emphasis of war that makes
True values, naught, the valueless to shine.
How stood the armies on this fourth of May—
The day of movement, then the grapple grim.

For first review, the column nearest Lee,
The one that crossed Germanna Ford, composed
Of Warren's Fifth, the Sixth, Sedgwick's command,
Two powerful corps equipped for war's demands;
At two P. M. Warren was up, his front
Beyond the Tavern and in position, next,
The Sixth, was clear across the Ford by six,
Its advance near the position, this corps
Was forced to take, when Lee launched his attack.
As we review these columns stretching back
For miles with clanking batteries at the end,
Like rattles on a snake that whirr and warn,
Apprehend here a living entity,
Morale, its spirit, from united will
And common purpose, thus the atoms formed
Of individual soldiers cohesive, sent
A force electric through the mass, thus raised
To highest voltage, every man became,

More than himself, endowed with strength to stand
The unendurable, through communicable
And added power, not so in these last days,
For instance, that huge war miscalled the great
Which tore a gap in Time and blew the years
To dust, or might we say, that then Mar's fist
Knocked four big teeth straight down the throat of time.
This martial period lost the kindred touch
Of moving armies, with their unit cells
Of companies, regiments, congeries of
Brigades and ganglia of various corps,
A living organism, was thus upbuilt.
In this last war so skilled something was lost,
The troops perforce were moved, in darkened trains
And huge lorries roared down the roads of France,
With separate loads of coal to feed the fires
Of Hell whose steady heat that must not lag.
Some miles to north the second corps had made

Its halt, near Chancellorsville ready to
march
Upon the morrow round the left and caused
Lee to conjecture where the blow might
fall.
The Federal cavalry had swept ahead
In all directions, feeling for Lee's force.
It was the army's eyes, but still how blind
Compared with aeroplanes, omniscient eyes
To read the whole terrain of battle, like
An open page, but in the Civil War,
The General must forecast his foe's intent
Behind a wall of hills past forest deep;
Testing their wisdom, Lee with height of
skill
Would oft foretell the purpose of his foe,
Meade too adept at times, in this high
test
Of generalship, but Grant, aggressive,
thought
Less of his opponent, more what he would
do.
His was the offensive that oft compelled
His foe to match his lead, his inner self
In action like a dynamo that whirrs
So swift it seems half silent, Grant's inmost
Nature set to the aggressive, encased

In form and manner like to metal cold,
Enclosing thus the incandescent flame;
Not like his countrymen to whom the man
Is king who swaggers, swears and beats his way
With bluff, in boyhood Grant was deemed a fool
Because he was so silent midst the brag
Of others; not articulate he said
It with flowers placed on tender graves of those
Who challenged, not his ambition, but opposed
The cause for which he waged continuous fight;
His continence of speech and nature fed
With unctuous flame his deep aggressive will
That guided the Republic through a war
To final peace. Now let us turn to Lee—
The morning of the fourth was time for him to loose
His legions, for into the wilderness
Was pouring fast the hosts of Meade and Grant.
Ewell's corps was the first released and took

The upper road nearest the river, called
The Orange Turnpike, later Hill and Heth
Leaped down the lower road, the Orange Plank,
Roads roughly parallel as we recall,
Splitting the wilderness a mile to two
Apart, these columns launched intent to pierce,
The Federal army stretched for miles along
The Germanna Road, thus speared to hold it high
Like to a wriggling eel above the waves
Of that thick jungle, but the rebels lacked
The concentrated strength to strike this blow.
Therefore Lee's new intention was to hold
Grant's army till his widely scattered troops
Longstreet's and Pickett's should have time to join
Their strength to his attack, this was Lee's plan
Of battle on the fifth; outnumbered three
To one, he backed the wilderness to aid,
Concealing his real strength and slowing up
All movement of the enemy enmeshed
Within the jungle, Grant had planned to reach

More open ground, in moving by the left
Outflanking Lee, who strove to put two spokes
To stop that ponderous wheel, from turning fast,
If once it got momentum! now both schemes
Tipped in the balance. Ewell was some hours
Ahead of Hill and halted till he could
Draw even on the lower road, the Plank.
In early afternoon there came first flash
Of quick electric contact where there met
Opposing outposts both on Plank and Pike;
Thus Lee succeeded in his tactics, aimed
To stabilize fluid events, to shape
Of battle, having held Grant's stronger force
The crisis panted keen to hold against
Superior numbers, till Longstreet arrived,
This effort doomed to last one bitter day.
Right here war's drama takes its highest pitch
Sustained suspense, the coming of reserves,
Napoleon's future balanced on the aid
Of Grouchy, Blücher brought the Allies help
And Waterloo was lost, Field Marshal Foch

Held his reserves, then at the proper time
Hurled them like thunderbolts against the Boche
In blasting ruin thus upon the brink
Of battle Lee sent for Longstreet, to start
His march in haste from Gordonsville, distant
Some thirty miles, whilst Grant dispatched the word
To Burnside, march at once, he too
Was thirty miles away, his camp towards
Manassas Junction; let us now compare
The two contestants in this crucial race,
Physically they were like two strong full backs
In the game which mimics the art of war,
Their function was to back the crumbling line,
Longstreet the Georgian was of stature tall,
Of powerful frame, strong bearded, slow
Oft sluggish but when by crisis roused
No longer "le noir faineant" as told
By Scott in Ivanhoe, from indifference
Changed to overwhelming fury, with a rush
Brought Victory, Burnside was also large
Of frame and wore a beard that bore his name,

Adorning either side his pink comeliness
Of face, but all unlike the Confederate,
The difference typified in shape of beards,
In Longstreet's rippling flow appeared real strength,
In Burnside's vanity, yet amiable,
His fine presence combined with genial ways
Kept him through years of blunder black with blood,
Until the Crater, then he too was fired,
Always his was the wheel that stuck in mud
Of sluggish action, held the army back;
In this campaign Burnside and Butler like
Two end men kept the ball of black defeat
Tossed back and forth above the struggling host,
The Army of the Potomac, destroyed
Grant's plan of action, yet he shares the blame
In last analysis, his the command,
But lacked the moral force to fire them both,
Until these two had wrought their futile worst,
Forcing the war to stretch another year.
At what a cost! so runs the tale of men

'Twas ever thus, as History long hath shown,
Our page the blackest, England's none too white,
Whilst Germany with perfect wisdom wrought
The damnedest folly of the whole damn bunch.
As postscript to Burnside's career I add
That Lincoln had a weakness for this man;
Because agreeable and honest, gave
To Lincoln's mind a restful cushion, tired
Of young Napoleons and official fools.
Upon this day of preparation, May
The Fourth, I too must follow suit and set
Before the reader's mind details of size,
And characteristics of these two foes;
The Army of Northern Virginia claims
As first, the eye of our analysis.
Drawn from all portions of the South, salute
The Carolinians, fired with fine élan,
Virginians fierce to free their commonwealth
From foul invasion, tall, gaunt Georgians
The men of Alabama, all alert
With martial spirit, mild Floridians,
The Texans lean as leather and as wild

As prairie wolves, all southern army, pure
American, e'en to the names derived
From English stock, with temper of that type.
No such army will we behold again
Of natural fighters, unified in blood,
Straight native dram unmixed, like liquid fire
To cause Mar's eyes to water, yet this brew
Not to be swallowed at a gulp, ask Grant,
By slow attrition sipped unto the last.
To change the image, like a piece of cloth
So woven and so firm, refused to rot,
But torn and worn, it frazzled to its end,
Leaving the south bereft through coming years.
This southern army was too finely drawn
But bore no fat of gross incompetence
By skilful officers its lively frame
Was supple sinewed, and behind each blow
Was every ounce of weight, co-ordinate
The muscles to defense, offense, in size
This Army of Northern Virginia had
All told seventy thousand of all arms.
The Army of the Potomac had size,
Equipment, many veteran units and thus
Their knowledge joined, to aid the fresh recruits,

But its natural speed was slowed by some defects
Of organization and of units;
There was the awkward joint command of Meade
And Grant, the necessity was here, since Meade
Though skilful, never had the punch to bring
Lee down, this Gettysburg had proved, so Grant's
Tenacity enforced Meade's will and freed
His shoulders from the weight of hard decisions;
Meade did the work, detail and drudgery, war's
Fierce continuous strain, made taut his temper, but
No soldier of the Union deserved more
Praise than he, forced to meet the hardest test
That ever soldier had, to do the work
And see another man receive the praise.
Well-nigh unscathed, he fought his way through fire
Of scorching envy, loyal to the end;
Severer test than trial by battle, Grant

Too has his meed of praise, his self control,
Freedom from vanity, singleness of aim
Made possible what rarely hath been done.
Another cause for this relation was
That Grant stood as nonconductor between
Currents of influence sent from Washington
That had heretofore oft disturbed the course
Of armies, malignant poisonous power,
None got by Grant to reach to General Meade,
Hard driven and high strung, yet power was lost
By dual control inevitably.
The night before the battle settled down
In beauty with dim darkness interfused
And loveliness of early May whose warmth
Laid tender cheek against the wilderness,
Yet War brewed poison for the morrow's dawn,
Tincture of lead and sulphur, treacle mixed
Of thoughts of country, martial dreams of fame.
Counter to nature were the plans of men,
With all his forces set himself to kill,
And deserts made of breadths of fertile land;

A nightmare world derived from bitter bile,
And looking backward seems an evil dream
When wakes the sleeper, but remember this
These soldiers were not pawns of hell, but fought
Sustained by deep convictions, cast in mold,
Worthy of honor, there's the riddle read
It as you will, I've other fish to fry.
Absorbed in routine duties, soldiers gave
But little thought of what the day would bring;
By campfires ate their suppers, laughed and joked;
Along the miles of dusky roads their arms
Were stacked to wait the call of battle dawns.
Sleep well, O soldiers! Long and rough the way,
A whole round year with just its circle clipt.
Parked back of each brigade, in open glades,
The trains of wagons filled with all supplies
Of food and ammunition, the scene alive
With hearty moving of rations to feed
The miles of soldiers camped along the roads;
There were long lines of tethered mules with heels

Of slender quickness, switching tails that marked
Danger, then through the darkness shone the gleams
Of moving lanterns; round the campfires' glow
The teamsters sat guffawing at the jests
Told by their joker; a hard bitten crew
Tough as the mules they drove with curses loud.
Then silence came and thru the darkness loomed
Like herds of elephants the wagons huge.
Feeling the issue brooding o'er that night
There comes a question pressing on the mind;
Did this impending avalanche of force
Make no impress upon the world unseen?
In presence just another night prepared
In softness for the growth of corn and grass;
But for a morrow, filled with strange import,
A vacancy, a void, that aches and aches
With black futility; and was there made
No preparation for the souls of men
Coming by thousands, streaming through the Gate

Wrenched from its hinges, spirits, torn
aghast,
Convulsed with horror, streaked with livid
hate,
Like countless leaves blown from the trees of
life
Through vacancy of space to lie at last
Winnowed against the wall of outer dark-
ness?
Not so, there is a force, kindred in thought
Unto ourselves, the world, the drama
formed
Of His objective mind, the source unseen,
Of comfort, punishment, and power, we
walk
The trail of his long foresight; back, far
back,
Before this battle pending to its doom,
Beneath His regard there grew a common
man
To bear in future weight of armies, watched
His patience grow, thru unillumined years,
Of dullest labor, saw his will ground smooth
As polished granite by the sands of coarse
Attrition, thus it rose a pillar formed
To bear War's burdens which had crushed to
earth

More brilliant men, whose natures were betrayed
By hidden cleavage, vanity, the lust
Of coarse desires, and fear of War's demands.
In man's destiny naught is certain, comes
At times a power that makes adjustment, else
Our world had fallen to certain ruin;
We note a presence far from God's left hand,
A shape, called Fortune whom men often greet
With laughter or with stoic faces set
Accept her action, oft her alien thread
Draws taut along the hem of human life,
Or History's robe, that else might ravel out.
I saw this form of influences slowly draw
Toward this field, intention but not haste
Throughout her mien and motion; soon the stars
Faded from splendor to pure points of light
Then disappeared, the bugles blew to life
The sleeping army, roads that long had dreamed,
Within the wilderness, suddenly awoke,

More thronged than crowded streets, yet not confused,
Through all the motion ran an order, swift
Precision, then cohesion, thus was wrought
A force from particles to power. The sound
Of bugles had not only roused the troops
Of Warren's and of Sedgewick's corps but stirred
Hancock's command, encamped five miles away
In northerly direction on the edge
Of Chancellorsville where Joe Hooker lost
To Lee; his was the Furnace road, well named
To bring his troops to such a battle, this
Transects the Brock near Tavern named for Todd,
Thus Hancock's powerful corps, would move below
The Wilderness, a threat and menace, this
That caused the compass needle of Lee's plans
To tremble, to deviate towards this mass
But with changing direction soon did point
Straight down the Plank, by fierce attraction drawn,
As will appear. Grant's movement had begun

In early morning, whilst the whitish mist
Hung heavy, thru the woods, breath of the swamps
That chilled the dubious air and beaded drops
Of moisture gathered on the guns and gemmed
The soldiers' beards; beyond the river, dust
Of Burnside's march rose on the distant plain.
The cavalry, like mobile fingers searched,
Thru forest, down the roads, to feel the first
Approach, and hold the enemy's advance,
Creeping like mist of gray along the roads.
Wilson's troopers in part to Parker's store
Upon the lower stringer called the Plank
Nailed to the Brock three miles towards the north;
More of his brigades swept the Catharpin road,
At Craig's Meeting House joined in hot debate,
Just like disgruntled brethren, with the men
Of Tolbert's troop, besides this scouting task,

The cavalry had guard of wagon trains,
Herded in corrals spiked with gleaming swords.
The infantry in this conflict was submerged
In suffocating seas of heated woods,
The cavalry alone was free to breathe,
Sweeping in wide adventures far afield;
The huge world war no dash of color showed
From this mobile arm, but by tense pressure
Of need, the cavalry was changed to forms
Which rose in air, as scouting steeds they wore
Gay trappings, squadrons galloping on high
Sabering the air, in silver flashes 'gainst the blue.
Our sole recourse when dazed with blood and sweat,
In this sub-forest battle is to take
To horse and ride with Sheridan afield.
The impending struggle holds us to our task,
We know that General Lee had opened wide
The sluices for his forces on the Fourth
And down the bed of the twin roads, the Plank,
And Orange Turnpike flowed two streams of death,

Gray volumes with the height and crested
sheen
Of sinister steel, these rivers ran too thin,
More body must be added to their strength,
Now where was lumbering Longstreet? Miles
away,
On the horizon near to Corbin's Bridge,
Faint sounds of battle just could reach his
ears,
Pulled out of drawing by Hancock's
approach,
So on the fifth of May, outnumbered, Lee
Was in his opponent's hand could it be closed.
But he carried the fight with such a rush
To Grant that he could not enforce his grip.
But now the time has come to fight it out,
Weigh in, Gentlemen, weigh in, there's the
gong,
The robe of waiting thrown aside we see
The Army of Northern Virginia stripped,
For action, lean, and sinewy, in heft
A light-heavy of lankey reach, and punch
Of paralyzing power, the other called
The Army of the Potomac, in size
A giant heavy weight with muscles huge
On back and knotted arms, not there the
speed,

The other had, some fat around the waist,
Burnside the sluggish made this extra weight.
Let's go, by God, a clever shot, quick work,
They're mixing now, look out big fellow, blood
First blood, the Southerner feints with rapid lefts
As strikes a darting snake, let's go his right,
In flash the blows that cut with gashing clefts,
The giant weakens, staggers, on the blink,
But reinforced he presses in despite
Harsh punishment and lands some jarring blows,
The round has gone half distance, breathing hard,
He clinches, striving with superior weight,
To tire his lighter foe, and as the day's
Fierce round proceeds, the Southerner became
Distressed, blinded with blood, but hid his hurt
Behind a front of highstrung courage, yet
The thudding fists blackened with blood beat hard
Against, a barbed defense, anon the head

Would snap against the spine from frightful
blows,
But the lean legs, unshaken held him up,
The Confederate chief in iron wrath that
surged,
To break the barrier of his self-control,
Suppressing anger spoke with added force:
"Come man, quit dozing, wake up, use your
left."
Responsive to a power that made its will
To rouse the dead, the Southerner accessed
To sudden fury, smothered back the blows,
Renewed attack, eight seconds to the end,
Sheer courage scarcely could maintain the
front
Of his offensive, dazed he guarded, blocked,
His knees were slowly sagging, whilst the
blow
Was poised to end the fight, it never struck,
A pause 'twas fatal, came the call of
"Time";
The warning night descending shoved the
two
Apart, "I'll see yo'uns tomorrow," spoke
The Southerner, spitting emphatic blood,
"Marse Robert just been fooling with you
Yanks."

Badly beaten but unbowed he crawled outside
The ropes, and all that night his seconds work
With frenzied skill, to bind his gaping wounds,
With courage planned upon the morrow, first
To stall, then strike, to bluff, then down the foe;
Whilst in the Federal camp they saw their chance,
And on the early morning planned to launch
The final blow, scarce was it light when rushed
The Northerner against his Southern foe,
No feint, no swings, straight blow succeeding blow,
Old wounds were open, weak with loss of blood
The champion of the South fought fiercely back,
His goose was cooked, three seconds more and done,
The Federal shifted for the final jolt,
Then suddenly appeared a giant form,
Longstreet had come, his presence gave new strength,

In furious rallies the Confederate drove
The giant to the ropes and for a time
Threatened to knock him clear beyond the ring,
But his reserves of strength and courage saved
His bacon, back he threw defeat's black cup
Straight in the victor's face, who slipped one blow,
Past guard of his opponent with his left
Till then unused, then came the battle's end.
Wearied to weakness both refused to yield,
And so they stood, past human semblance, black
With blood; from throats of partisans there rose
The yell, "We've won," a silence, the referee
Advanced, threw up both hands and cried, "A draw"
Then bedlam broke, from all directions, yells
Of "robber," "you big piece of cheese," "back
To the farm" the Northern side declaimed, "we had
Lee going," "wrong," exclaimed the South, "we stopped

Old Grant and beat him to the punch," "Oh ho!"
Yells back the North, "Ulysses taught Bob Lee
A lesson from that day, he never left
Defensive lines, but ducked behind his guns."
"Say Yank, maybe Marse Robert didn't know
That game, remember Cold Harbor, Yank,
When Lee made Grant pile up blue chips sky-high,
Then raked the pile, Cold Harbor that's the name
To give you Yanks a chill," "Yeah" yells the North
"Remember, when Ulysses slipt across the James
His army of one hundred thousand men,
Whilst Lee was napping, then he rubbed his eyes
Gazed skyward wondering where old Grant had flown."
Friend reader here you have in few, brief lines,
The gist of the campaign, that grew enriched
From soil and culture of the Wilderness.

No longer can I with light steps avoid
The clash of Terror but step close and gaze
Following the battle as it rose and fell,
In rough unequal waves, thru days of storm,
That cast upon a shore confused with roar
Of thunder, wrecks of men, one moment thrilled
With wildest exultation, dropped inert
Swift change and horrible, the sport of Death's
Dull tides; the dash of cavalry had blown
As first, fresh breeze, betokening the storm
Black muttering to itself, its womb alive
With snakes of wriggling fire and filled with doom.
Grant planned a battle fitted to the fray,
Sedgwick's sixth corps upon the Federal Right
To hold, contain Lee's left, of Ewell's corps
Where stamped old Jubal Early, Gordon, apt
To vex the Ancient's soul, by his gay youth,
This flank was formed upon the Orange Pike
Extending westward towards the Spottswood place,
Eastward seeking connection with the Plank.

Too bad! the Federal container was a sieve.
According to the plans, so neatly made,
Warren's Fifth corps to march to Parker's store
Extending westward join its right with left
Of Sedgwick, Burnside, up to plug the center,
Hancock to threaten Lee's extremest right.
When Grant presented this neat battle plan
To General Lee that perfect chieftain rose
In anger roused by one possessive phrase
Of Parker's store, "'Tis mine presumptuous foe
Already have foreclosed, get out," they got.
Then whipping from the holster at his side
His ready gun with peppery shots he sieved
Grant's plan of battle kicked it out of doors
A crumpled ruin, Grant imperturbable
No artist soul of touchy choler, took
Material, made another battle sketch
"This will suit Lee better," was all he said
Grant knew war's way of crumpling wisest plans,
No proper balance in this fight appeared;
Center outchested two supporting wings,
Then Lee drove in a blow to Grant's short ribs

That drew his lines far stretched, in direful pain,
Knotted, convulsive, Hancock thus was drawn
To junction of the Orange Plank and Brock
And from the right, this left was reinforced,
As blood congestive settles on a blow
In time this sector was just black and blue.
Between the hour of dawn and blazing noon
The left of Warren's corps was beaten back
By Hill and Heth; as Warren strove, with urge
To reach Parker's emporium, gray dogs
Kept rushing out with loud acclaim to drive
Unwelcome visitors thru thickets, down
The road, Hancock was ordered up about
The hour of nine, his advance then two miles
Beyond Todd's Tavern, where the Furnace Road
Catharpin crossed the Brock, continuing south,
His leading troops were on this former road,
His orders made him to go in reverse
Time eating manœuvre as when a freight
Backs from a spur to take the line again;
All told the march and countermarch, devoured

Five hours, before Hancock could reach the field.
Meanwhile Lee like a skillful Toreador
Had flung the cloak of the black wilderness
Before blue Taurus rushing forth in rage
His shoulders wet with blood from sticking darts,
Stampeded, he returned with lowered head
Nostrils throbbing fire, horns wide curved, points keen
As polished steel, or this simile—; a whale,
Enmeshed and helpless, so harpooned at will
Threshing the sea to waves of bloody froth.
Now let us take the path of plain narration.
The first access of battle on Grant's right
In front of Wilderness Tavern along
The Orange Turnpike and involved the right
Of Warren's most of Sedgwick's corps in fight
With Ewell, but this fire of conflict died
To smouldering smoke by dull inaction quenched,
But sparks were carried by a quartering wind
Into the wilderness, twixt Pike and Plank,
Starting a fire that roared and billowed towards

Parker's Store, driven by a contrary wind,
Flamed down the Orange Plank between the hours
Of eleven and of two; Getty's brigade
Of Sedgwick's corps was shuffled from the right
And stretched at tension, crossways of the Plank,
Striving to hold Heth's strong division, formed
Along a slight upslanting of the ground
Left flank protected by the Ny, the right
By swamps; either thru luck or skill, or both
The Confederates seemed to have and to hold
The best positions, likewise their bright guns
Were placed in clearings near some open farm
Where they could breathe out loud and bust the foe;
But Grant's artillery was bound horse and foot
By jungle thongs of few and narrow roads,
A hindrance proved to passage of the troops,

Late on the second day, Dow's battery worked
To fine advantage, that about was all
The artillery had to say upon those days,
In iron dumbness not in rising roar.
Now Getty's right was not supported, where
It pointed westward from the Orange Plank
In direction towards the Orange Pike
And Warren's left, east of the Pike, likewise
In air, if air it could be called, and soon
Was caught in jaws of Lee's gaunt tiger, there
Wadsworth, of the Fifth, whilst struggling thru the brush
Striving to join with Getty was thrown back
Severely mauled; Crawford from Warren's corps
With his division stood at Chewning's Farm
Pointing with twitching nose toward Parker's Store,
But down the wind there came a scent of tiger,
With little damage this division backed
Towards the Lacy House south of the road,
Germanna, where an atmosphere more quiet,
And vastly more refined awaited it;

And at this point and place, during a lull,
Whilst Lee's tired tiger stopped for second wind,
And waiting Hancock's arrival,—a knoll
Attracts our gaze, from here both Grant and Meade
Observe the course of battle, Grant sits calm
Whittling a stick, while Meade as eagle fierce
Marks with high tension, where the burning woods
Shows the desultory battle on the Pike;
Here Ewell versus Warren, and the corps
Of Sedgwick argued back and forth the case,
Decision was reserved, and handed down.
Then Grant with level glasses gazed across
The central foreground where some miles to south,
Beyond the jungle thickets bathed in light
Towards Parker's rose sulphurous vapor, then
In bluish columns thru the heights of air,
But lower down the woods were choked with fumes;
Grant shifted gazing eastward down the road

With grim intentness where the Plank obscured
By woods did notch the Brock, the crisis point,
Looking for Hancock where the need was great.
Hark! Did Grant murmur pressed for telling speech,
"Hancock or noon!" No, not a murmur came,
Ulysses never rose to feathered speech,
Not his, "Soldiers from yonder pyramids,"
He lacked all flash of words, no aptitude
That way, no silver trumpet flared his speech,
But coarsely crystallized, like iron rang
Vibrating thru the metal, such as made
His countrymen. We come to afternoon
And note the hour of two, sole point of Time
In flood and flux of battle thru that Day
To crystallize events, that was the hour
When Crawford, left of Warren's corps, withdrew
To Lacy's Farm, and Wilcox formed his line
From direction of the Plank to join

With Ewell's force extending from the Pike,
The Confederates alone showed sufficient skill
To bridge the Wilderness from Road to Road.
'Twas at this hour that Hill was beating back
The force of Getty making him to walk
The Plank to the black waters of defeat.
"Come on! You Hancock!" but he cannot move,
The Brock is blocked by trains of horse and guns,
Artillery galore, no earthly use,
Some one had blundered, this the shame of war
When chasms, made by careless fools, inept,
Arrayed in garb of military strut,
Are filled with bodies piled on bodies, till
Mar's chariot wheels could, in bruising weight
And unimpeded roll thru muck and blood.
"Come on! look Getty now is surely gone";
Then thru the dam that stretched across the Brock
There burst a rider, Hancock the superb,
His great sorrel a-fleck and flamed for fight,

His fine and powerful presence filled with urge
Of War's grim crisis, back of him there came
A rush of blue, the men of Birney's, then
At double quick, spreading to left and right,
And up the Orange Plank, with white elan,
To check and hold the troops, of Hill and Heth,
Charging triumphant thru the battered men
Of Getty's panting now behind this new
And sudden barrier; long and gallantly had
They fought and now relief, as in a race
Of old the runner falls, gasping, the torch
He falters to the one who takes his place.
Scarce taking time to breathe, Grant's orders sent
Hancock ahead to counter on Lee's right
Behind the baffling jungle and wide swamps.
Birney was on the Plank, upon his left
Mott's ill-omened troops, Gibbon's division next,
Then Frank's brigade, upon the furthest left
Way down the Brock; right there at urgent start

Hancock received initiation at hand,
Of old man Wilderness who grimly hazed
Those who trespassed on his forbidden ground;
Both blue and gray alike, not one escaped
Harsh chastening, Hancock, Grant and Meade,
And on the other side, Ewell and Early.
Struggle as he might Hancock never could
Get going as his wont, his left was held
In tension by the threat of Longstreet who
Was miles away, and Sheridan whose forte
It was to scout, to find and to report,
Left Meade in blindness thru two battling days
But little Phil (no hybrid he, by birth
And nature real American) was far
Below his best; then Stewart who knew the game
From A to Z with plus at either end
Baffled our gallant Phil, and all the Fifth
Jabbed him off balance, kept him in a haze
Of minor conflicts, so he never knew
What to report; throughout that afternoon
Hancock kept struggling to align his troops
For movement 'gainst Lee's attenuated right.

At length he started but in second speed,
No shooting thru in high on such a route,
An Ideal Tour to Hades so it seemed;
Not fast he moved but with increasing power:
Yet for a time the troops of Hill and Heth
Held back this crushing force, how could they stand
Outnumbered worn by hours of battling? Lee
Beheld the need, recalled Wilcox, who stretched
West of the Plank, to quench this rising blaze,
That threatened soon to burn Lee's right to crisp,
While from the Widow Tapp's, the rebel guns
Strove with recurring boom to pound and break
The Federal charge, but naught could stop it now
The Confederate line was borne away
Upon the flood; Lee's right was on the edge
Of ruin, just toppling—then rose as though
From out the ground, born in the thickets gloomed

By darksome pines,—the presence of the night,
The Federal leaders knew that though this power
Had grasped with black benumbing hands and stayed
Their sword descending, still they wisely planned,
That when its grip would loosen ere so slight,
That sword should fall and sever with one stroke
The right of the Confederate line, then Lee's
Defeat was certain, yet despite these odds
They had to face, the rebels strove to patch,
Repair their broken fences, here with rails
And there with mending boards or rusted wire.
At best appeared, a flimsy thing to stop
The swaying swing of that blue battering ram.
The night between two days of battle showed
No usual softness framed for rest, but strained
As though deep Hell had seized this stretch of Time,

Itself insurgent thru the deeds of men
Death welcomed to Life's feast, behold now where
In burning wood, the stricken soldier lies
Twice martyred, first by wounds and then by fire,
Strange cautery they received, 'twas all they had;
Tormented by fierce thirst from loss of blood,
And heat of woods in summer, called for drink,
Some slowly dragged their shattered limbs to seek
For water, mostly gasped away in dry
Death rattles, suffocating in a grave
Of pressing darkness, twixt the lines they writhed,
Calling in agony, that stabbed the night,
With unexampled horror, whilst in glades
Were pitched, dim tents where limbs were sawed and thrown
Outside, as piles of wood, the surgeons red
As butchers, nor were those the happy days
Of perfect anæsthesia nor the skill,
Of antiseptic science, such as made
The War of Nations seem a pleasant thing

Compared with that wherein our fathers
fought,
To save a nation, so that other flags
Of hybrid meaning might be raised to float
Beside the one they suffered to maintain.
Suffered! the very sponges used to cleanse
Infected wounds were washed in water cold,
Then full of germs were thrust in other
wounds,
Spreading gangrene, the blush of hideous
death,
The surgeons were the victims of their day,
Oft rendered noble service to the bounds
Of what they knew, but let it now be said
Our Civil War was cruel past belief.
Let us remember we, who grumble, growl,
Self-seeking, filled with envy, hate, and all
Unmindful of the price our fathers paid
For this our heritage; no guff is this,
No waving of Old Glory, but the truth,
For those who bear man's semblance and who
give
As well as take and scorn to spend at ease
With lavish motion, all the past hath won
Of liberty and forward hopes of man,
In recollection hold those days that laid
Our foundation in permanence that was

As purple porphyry dyed with essential
blood.
Let us return and follow close the strife,
That woke upon the morrow at the hour
Of five against Ewell who stood astride
The Orange Turnpike, Wright attacked, his
troops
Of Sedgwick's corps, and Warren with him
joined
His was the left and center of the flank.
The tale of battle on Grant's right can soon
Be told, till half past ten the time was
marked
By one assault, and then another, naught
Was gained, in statu quo, the order came,
"Desist from firing and entrench your front."
Thus protected, off the right all day
Was drawn brigades and more, to reinforce
The fighting left, its balance laid across
The Orange Plank well suited to that act,
As on the Turnpike stretched the other flank.
Birney advanced to finish with one stroke
The work night stopped, and severed Lee's
right wing,
By one poor sinew held, on Birney's left
Was Mott, compelled to move thru brush and
swamp

And on the right, west of the Orange Plank
Marched Wadsworth's division from Warren's corps,
Behind a second line, were Getty's troops
Buttressed by Carroll, note that name will stand
In clearer color later on this day;
Owen back of Carroll, the last support,
Their two brigades, from General Gibbon's, thus
Was this formation since no troops could move
In Echelon, the Wilderness did put
All movement into straight jacket roads
Or narrow areas, thus the troops appeared
Superimposed, few were the manœuvres there.
The woods were heavy with the sweat of dew,
The sun just making live the darker green
Of higher trees, as on a long slight rise
Behind entrenchments crouched the troops of Hill
And Heth, I use these names as though a team
In vaudeville, their act unpopular,
Their audience tried to chase them from the stage.

Many the heads bound round, and bandaged chests
And arms, yet keen with zest, a second gun
Leaned loaded by their sides, ready to seize,
Then from the open ground of Widow Tapp's
There barked and barked again a group of brass
High muzzled hounds, Marse Robert's pets, and used
By him in hunting, leaping now in joy
Around their master, then their noses raised
And bayed aloud, at something moving down
The distant road, a color and a scent
Displeasing to their sense of who belonged,
From trees there fell the broken limbs and showers
Of branches, or a bursting shell with spang
Of mud, or iron fragments tore a mass
Of blue to mangled blood, few scored a hit,
On came the Federal sweeping up the Plank
The trembling of the brush on either side,
Moving as doth a wave, with menace, showed
Their coming, save that, nothing else was seen;

A thrill of iron exultation lit
The line of crouching soldiers garbed in gray
Or plainer butternut, and from their guns
In level unison, the hate of lead,
Whanged forth and breath of sulphur stained the air,
Again, again, in hideous rhythm, blow,
Succeeding blow and timed with flash on flash
Like teeth of grinning hate, gleamed thru the smoke
Long waves of crackling leaped from out the line
Brief intervals, dotted with staccato
Of command, then a shrill crescendo "fire!"
Behind them deeper boom of cannon, shapes
Of massive smoke ballooned above the tops
Of trees, the air was sieved direct with zip
Of countless bullets, many whined in zest
Of hunger, some with satiate thud embedded
In a soldier's chest, or keenly ravening
Tore at the bark of trees, or chewed them down.
Undaunted came the rush of Federal troops

Dark forms fast falling, left to blotch the road
Whilst in the bush and swamp they dropped unheeded.
Left to writhe, wrestling the hounds that Death
Had loosed to strike the trail of blood, although
The morning saw them gaunt, by night were gorged,
Nuzzling perchance some morsel, dainty, browned
Of human flesh, nor were the Federals quiet
Beneath this scourge of fire, for at command
Their rifles jumped against their shoulders taut,
Their forms bent slightly forward and the cloth
Of uniforms was wrinkled at the back
With tension of the pose, the eye intent
Pierced forward straight beyond the beaded sight,
Outsped through flames, the light of level lead
And tore white shattering splinters from the logs
Of the entrenchments or struck low in dirt,

And many a soldier sank inert in death
A bluish hole that marked the forehead, whilst
At the back, there squashed a blotch of brains and blood.
After the volleys charged the Federal troops
Until the lines together heaved and swayed
Like two fierce wrestlers till with efforts huge
The giant as in old time sport reached round
With one quick foot and sprawled his lighter foe,
Who fell beneath his bulk half done and stunned,
From out the symbol let's release the facts:
Hill's lines were broken, shredded, torn and tost.
What now could stop the fierce o'ertoppling sweep
Of Birney's soldiers, wave succeeding wave
Engulfing, swirling down to mud great hunks
Of what had been a wall of living gray;
One rock remained to stem that onward rush,
The clump of guns around the Widow Tapp's,

They too endangered, if the Union troops
With none to hinder, worked thru swamp and brush
Outflanked these rebel batteries, struck their rear.
The cannon are the army's backbone, yet
As sensitive to hostile hand or grasp,
As is the spinal cord, to alien touch,
To lose a gun was counted grim disgrace
To all the army. "Come on! charge, you men
Of Maine, New York, Vermont, you've got them now
They're cracked and busted, done for, Lee is whipt."
Still ugly, Hill's lank veterans quickly turn
In snarling packs and fire in level leaps
Of musketry at the flushed Federals, close
Upon their heels. And further westward, Heth
And Wilcox broken though they are, resist
With quick erratic volleys, like the gasp
Of one, whose enemy, tightens around
The windpipe; mark the battle has not gone
One hour of time and Grant has all the day
To finish up the work so well begun,

Evicting Lee's long line past Parker's Store,
Then westward till the Wilderness is cleared
The Fate of the Confederacy was limned
In lines of Milton, filled with lambent fire,
"From morn to noon they fell, from noon
To dewy eve, a summer's day."
Some vision, thus to make it real the men
Of Birney's drew breath for one final plunge
As up the road faded the last of Hill's
Defeated men, "Hey buddies, look, what's that?"
Yelled out a grizzled sergeant pointing, "More
Of them Johnnies, Longstreet, by God, here's where
We fight, you bet." 'Twas true one thrusting mass
Of gray clad soldiers split the shadowy road,
Quick menace, at the double and the tread
Of martial thousands made the quivering plank
Vibrate, beneath the Federal troops who stood
At check; as from a threatening cloud there thrusts
A flash of keenest lightning, so there leaped

Three horsemen from that war-driven cloud of gray
Foremost a strong built man, with bearded power
And port of war, his countenance full flushed
With vigor of the crisis now that loomed;
He reined his charger on a rise beside
The road, his able subordinates grouped
In true perspective, with one look he swept
The field, then with his energy repressed
Through marching hours now released, he hurled
With thrusting hand his fierce divisions, right
Center, left, Kershaw, Anderson and Fields;
Each unit felt the outward shove and force
Of their great leader's outthrust arm and will,
With sounding impact struck the foe's advance,
In fact the Federal lines, were all awry,
Irregular by their victorious rush,
And broken by the thrust of jungle, brush;
So Birney's left east of the Plank and deep
In brush, too far beyond his center, this

Longstreet was quick to see, and roared to Kershaw
"Make that Yankee whelp dress on his center."
This bad alignment grieved him to the core,
'Twas soon corrected but Kershaw, inclined
To go too far, was twisting back Birney's
Left arm, to make it helpless for the fray.
The lines were re-established under fire—
Birney and Wadsworth, Cutler of the Fifth,
The left of center backed by General Webb,
These battled thru the morning on the Plank
And off, against the men of Anderson
And Fields, with fortunes swaying back and forth,
Like powerful wrestlers who can never gain
Distinct advantage, acres of heavy brush
Were trampled as by rush of charging bulls
And underneath the matted green there ran
Strange rivulets of darker hue than those
Of nature, whilst continually the fire
Was fed with oil of human life and blood;
When died the flames of combat down to smudge,
In flowed a stream that caused the fire to leap

To the intensity of molten air,
This holocaust was fed, from right and left
And center of Grant's line, Getty of Sedgwick's
Corps, Stevenson's division from the ninth,
Owen, Carroll, Webb of the second corps
These formed Gibbon's division, all were drawn
By draft that drew in suction up the Plank
Into the roaring furnace of the fight.
And now we turn to tie the ravelled ends
Of this our narrative of what occurred
Outside the zone of battle on this flank.
(Time, twixt the hours of seven, eleven)
Important aye well nigh decisive these
Events beyond the clashing zone, as though
Some enemy's deceitful hand was placed
Upon the levers, sidetracking this main
Movement, or running that on some blind spur.
There is relaxation in change from roar
Of battle to affairs of lesser strain,
Yet in war, minor matters possess
A grave import that gives significance,—
A sunken road; access of sudden fear
Upon a leader's mind might make for ruin.

So runs the legend that our eyes now scan;
Throughout the morning hours from six till noon
A comedy of errors ruled the left,
Scarce humorous for the men who died in droves,
But war alas, too often has been brewed
By folly of the wise, its fortunes then
In hands of pompous fools, or traitors who
For their religion, knife their country's cause.
The Federal errors clustered round two points:
That Burnside would arrive upon the sixth
In early morning, then to aid attack
On left of center supporting Hancock;
The second, fear lest Longstreet or Pickett
Were coming round the left to strike the rear.
To Grant and Meade upon the knoll of pines
There came the noise of battle o'er two miles
Of wood with long drawn crackle and the boom
Of deep-mouthed cannon, Grant scarce raised his head,

Stopped whittling, then remarked to General
Meade,
"Hancock's loose, where's Longstreet"? then
whittled slow;
But Meade who bore the burden of the
day's
Intolerable detail, growled forth in rage,
"Where's Burnside, General? that's the
question now,"
Grant's knife no deeper cut the tender
stick
He turned it round and shaped the other
end,
At that tense moment galloped up an aide,
Swung off, gray white with dust, at straight
salute
Before the glare of Meade, reported crisp
Where Burnside was, the tall, lean form of
Meade
Forthwith seemed charged with blue electric
flame,
Vibrating through his nerves, the veins that
marked
His forehead swelled beyond their natural
wont,
His voice not loud, intense, crackled the
air;

Like a lion, determinate distance paced,
Stopping with hand behind his back tight clasped
In knotted wrath his eagle profile keen,
With eyes that burnt the distance and focused
Thru stolid Burnside where he rode thru woods
In leaden slowness, uneasily he shifts
But makes no haste, and all the time Meade heard
The fast increasing roar of battle, where
Along the road Hancock had loosed his charge,
Looking for Burnside to complete the blow.
Grant had risen, approaching where Meade raged,
Who turning viewed his chief his temper leashed
By discipline, for be it known that Meade
Was soldier thru and thru, and bore in this
Campaign the brunt of things hard to endure,
And kept his country, higher than his pride,
To the Republic gave his steady skill,
And steered his course unto the end, despite

Strange baffling winds and treacherous currents.
In later life deprived of his just due,
While Sheridan, Grant's favorite forged
Ahead, so runs the legend of this world.
Grant wearing now the mask of grim control,
Wrote out two orders, then two aide de camps
With instant speed dashed down the knoll, the one
Upon the slender sorrel galloped fast
With dinning hoofs straight for the Orange Pike
Where Warren fronted Ewell whilst the aide
Upon the buoyant bay swift dusted down
The Germanna towards the crater smoke
Where burst the battle of the blazing Brock
In leaden lava and sulphurous smoke,
Past lines of soldiers ready for the march,
Who jeered and laughed, not softly, as he passed,
His sashed and dapper form provoking mirth.
"Look out, Ole boy, the Johnnies will grab you sure

And tie that pretty ribbon round your yeahs"
"I'd rather shoot them chaps than any Rebs,"
Growled out another, "Them West Pointers, too
Damned mean to live; Ulysses ain't
Their style," declared a third, "A feller told
The other day, a drover had a bunch
Of steers, and one got loose, he saw a man
Nearby the road, he didn't know 'twas Grant,
And yells 'Ole man, turn back that critter,' and
The General runs, throws up his hands and yells,
He knew the feller didn't know 'twas him;
If it had been a lieutenant or some of those
Headquarter birds, they'd had the feller shot."
So ran the talk of soldiers, not unwise
And with a humor keen oft scored a hit
In circle of the truth though coarse their sights,
Adjusted not to meet each varying wind.
The pressing question now, where's Burnside, near

And yet so far, his troops were up in line
Twixt eight and nine, but stood upon the brink
Of battle never wading in till two
P. M. and then with caution, this despite
Loud cries for aid, and also Burnside knew
That Hancock had made his dispositions with
A view to his assistance, Humphreys, Meade's
Chief of staff, able, expert, efficient,
Without one gesture, he, the writer who
Alone of all the chroniclers described
Adequately the tangled struggle waged
Within the Wilderness, his style compact
As Cæsar's and as calm, fit gauntlet formed
For hand of war that moves thru science based
On mathematics, Humphreys' calm verdict
Says that Burnside's presence caused Lee to keep
Back some troops to strike and counter against
This powerful corps when it attacked as Lee
Supposed it would, being the order of the day,

All Burnside put in balance, just
A shadow, not to his credit the fact
That shadows in the wilderness became
Realities, so that Early refused
To take the offensive upon that day,
Because the commander of the ninth was near
At hand; Burnside, the bugaboo, appeared,
Terrible with eyes of fire, ferocious teeth
But hollow of intent; whilst hell was loose
Against his comrades, Burnside sat at lunch
Along the roadside, hamper opened wide
Champagne b'gosh and other things to eat.
Grant as at Donelson had simpler fare,
Slicing a cucumber, he standing, poured
Vinegar over it, that was his lunch.
Burnside might picnic in war times, not Grant;
An Union man, Ambrose kept stated hours
And hated overtime ill paid with work
And weariness, so much for Burnside, now
The second cause of error looms before
Our vision, Hancock played in evil luck;
If Burnside not enough in evidence
Longstreet was far too much, as will appear;
His shadowy legions moved in threat against

The Federal left, and kept it taut in fear,
His real battalions fought both sides the Plank,
And so did double duty on that day,
Another worry to heap the measure full
For Hancock, where was Pickett, here
Or there? in fact, was miles away, below
Hanover Junction, Lee was forced to play
His hand wide scattered, with consumate care,
This card of Pickett's corps he was to slam
Upon the board of some soon coming field;
Lee's method was to play a hidden card
And seize the trick, the Wilderness combined
With ignorance that should have been dispelled
By proper scouting, kept the leaders wrapt
In fog, where loomed strange shapes of terror formed
Of moving mist; the left was jumpy, oft
Beheld the phantom Pickett grab its rear.
A dread report, "the Rebs are on the Brock,
To turn our flank," to meet this menace Brook's
Brigade was sent posthaste, and barred the road

With quick entrenchments, crouching, waited there
Breathless, the coming charge, it seemed delayed,
That raging pack of wolves on instant changed
To convalescent sheep, some hundred men
Discharged from hospitals, to take their place
Once more in line with comrades, thus welcomed
They sought another road, and exit made.
That flank still quivering, as a horse on edge
For fright, received new shock, Longstreet appeared,
Or was it Pickett, mayhap Anderson,
Since he had failed to make a due report
In person to the Federal chiefs, in fact
His troops that moment were engaged along
The Plank, and yet a strong attack was loosed
Against the tip of Hancock's wing that felt
Extremely fluttered, not Pickett, Longstreet,
Nor Anderson, the cause of all this belli,

Dismounted cavalry, a few stray guns,
And then disturbance, thus example gives
Of how the Southerners were forced to make
Good double use of all they had on hand;
Like to the thrifty poor of other days
Who turned their garments, made a nickel go
A dollar's gait, likewise with shifting speed
Recounted numbers, where was greatest need.
Later the Confederacy might be compared
To the Bon Homme Richard, Paul Jones' commanding,
Patched canvas, scarce seaworthy, fought
The towering frigates of the British line;
There skill, resource and daring took the place
Of tonnage and equipment and the weight
Of metal, in this self same spirit fought
The Confederate army and its chiefs.
Now aimed to keep the pot a-boiling, note
At Todd's old Tavern down the Brock, the fire
Of Sheridan, who barked aloud as Stewart
Chirruped his rage to choler for a fight,
Derisive whistling, lured him far afield.
"What's all this shooting?" gasped the Federal chiefs.

The trembling flank now paralyzed with fear,
Unfit for action when it was required.
Of all misfortunes such as marred and murked
That morning's work, the heaviest was the loss
Of Barlow's strong division on the line,
He failed, though ordered to connect his troops
With Mott's and Birney's left below the Plank,
Frank's brigade only took position on
Mott's left, and so from early morning hours
Birney's offensive lacked the proper force.
Of greater menace was the dangerous gap
Between the left of Birney's, Frank's brigade,
And Barlow's division down the Brock;
In place of a long and sinewy arm, to strike
A stump was all that showed of Birney's left
Cut off a few short inches from the shoulder.
Would Longstreet overlook the chance to wreck
The Federal flank? Some scouts of Kershaw's found

This gate wide open, thus no need to break
The wall of an impregnable defense,
Just walk right in, this Longstreet was to do.
Thus on that day Hancock the ablest far
Of Grant's Lieutenants had to carry weight
Of heaviest handicaps, and undeserved,
Testing his fighting spirit to the end
And limit of its fiber; here two men
Were matched to wage Homeric battle, first
The bearded Georgian, slow to rouse, when stirred,
His frame was fused by warlike force, his mind
High stationed on the watch tower of his will.
Hancock in blond perfection filled the outer eye
And of a martial mold seemed formed to lead,
Upon the field of battle, whilst a corps
Fitted his talents just like hand to glove,
Rare man, knowing his scope, abided there,
Compact, within his sphere, unvexed by lure
Of vain ambition, if this soldier had,

Only maintained this poise in later life,
He would have missed his one, his great defeat.
(Now listen children, soldier boys so brave
And simple sailor lads should never play,
The game of politics, 'tis not their *game*
'Tis only fit for Irishers and the likes
Of them, Sherman and Sheridan were wise,)
Our interlude of error now is played
War's harmony whose notes are but discord;
We come upon the phase that makes complete
The ravage of that morn that had awaked
With kiss of spring pressed warm against its cheek
To lead it gently on to nuptial noon,
And fair fruition of the later day,
That body slim, with golden beauty crowned
Lies now dishonored, black with bruising blood
In dumb inanition every breath a moan.
Menace and utter ruin was being brewed
By Longstreet 'gainst the Union arms, his face
Flushed sinister in triumph, soon complete,
Swiftly, with silent stealth prepared to strike,

Screened by the Wilderness and crush the
left
Of Grant's huge army, then upon the hip
To hurl it bodily outside the ropes,
Sprawling beyond the Rapidan, why not?
It had been done, before and not so far
Away at Chancellorsville when Stonewall
Unperceived with his gray troopers of the
dust
Ripped down the Federal Flank with frightful
claws
Until its length was dripping in long shreds,
Jackson was gone but Longstreet now was
here,
Not blessed with Stonewall's keenness that
attacked
And cut as doth a sword whose swiftness
takes
The intercepted lightning of the sun;
But Longstreet swung a battle axe whose
weight
But few could lift, it crushed defenses, sharp
Two edged, it cuts and scatters, yet this
giant
Employed not maddened force alone, behind
His ponderous blows, a mind when roused of
deep

Sagacity and more than Indian stealth.
The friendly Wilderness, gave to his hand
A helpful ally, Reader scan the map,
Discover there half hidden thru the brush
Longstreet's whilom comrade, yes, that is it,
Along the fringe some hundred yards removed
And parallel unto the Orange Plank,
That frowsy bed of the half finished railroad,
Part brother to the three main battle roads,
The Brock, the Orange Turnpike, and the Plank,
It lay neglected long the eastern edge
Of that hushed wilderness, but like a knife,
Carelessly trodden on, might turn and cut
The foot, or like a snake from lethargy.
Aroused might lift and strike, such chance was there.
The Federals had foreseen in part this threat,
And where, it slanted wide towards Stephen Triggs
Just off the Brock, placed guns to guard approach,
This railroad bed part overgrown, unused,
Longstreet was soon to change to Victory's Way,

Whilst he prepared this blow, between the hours
Of ten and eleven the fight continued fierce,
Birney and Wadsworth interlocked with Field
And Anderson, in region of the Plank;
On Birney's left past Mott was Frank's brigade,
Recall the stump that should have been an arm,
These units tired with strain of battle waged
In heat of woods, smoke soaked with sulphur fumes,
Their ammunition too was well nigh gone.
Old Wilderness kept fighting with its craft,
In aid of Lee, hiding his skifted troops,
Clutching and holding back with thorny hand
All reinforcements sent when crisis called.
Before the time of noon there came a lull
Ominous to those who felt its meaning, yet
Welcomed by Mott's and Frank's brigade, well pleased
To think that Longstreet's minions had received
Enough, look past the screening woods there moved

By the Confederate right, south from the road,
The menace, men in gray by thousands, not
A throng, but measured lines that moved intent
With purpose; standing back a hundred paces
You could not see one soldier of that host,
Closer you caught a glimpse of moving gray
That merged in shadows in the woods beyond.
This stream maintained a constant flow that moved
Half hidden, that was all the eyes beheld,
The ears heard nothing but the roar of guns
On either side the road, thus passed the troops
Of Wofford's brigade, Anderson's from Hill's
Men of Mahone's Commander of this raid,
A whiskered gnome, a strange contrast in size,
Unto his giant leader, one blue streak
Of fighting flame, and to this column soon
Added Davis' brigade of Heth's command;
One brief half hour, that railroad bed was filled

By one lean column stretching on and on
Thru dusk and shadow, touched with scanty gleams
Of sunshine, then on signal changed its front
Facing due north, in motion then advanced,
In keen elation thru the heavy woods
Towards their unsuspecting foes who thought
His enemies were all upon his front
And never dreamed of thousands more to come
Where least expected—then the deluge broke
On Birney's flank and rear, it seemed as though
A new confederate army leaped to life
From out the forest, not a sound of their
Approach above the battle, then like wolves
Uncounted leaped upon their foe, scarce seen
Before shot down, or taken captive, thus
Frank's brigade quickly broken was engulfed,
Advancing with a seething roar, they struck
A narrow dyke of blue thrown up in haste.
McAllister had heard alarming shots

From left and rear, and quickly changed his front,
His force o'erlapped and near surrounded, broke
For the Brock, found refuge behind the line
Of long entrenchments, that were handy now,
No time to warn the men of Mott, immersed
In battle, now their turn to be surprised,
Like floundering blue fish were scooped in nets
Of steel drawn by those crafty fishermen
Longstreet's and Heth and Hill, in from the depths
Of Wilderness they made one mighty haul,
"Blue fish and suckers" grinned a rebel wit,
Not all were suckers as will soon appear.
Cut out the bunk, there comes a time to quit,
A tide in man's affairs to take the ebb.
Far as the Plank the men stopped work and walked
Intently out unheeding shouts and shots
Of irate bosses, here might wise historians say

Was norm of the town meeting that became
The form of democratic action, thus
Achieved in midst of battle; they revised
That motto famed and framed in other days,
"Theirs not to reason why, theirs but to stick
And die, some one had blundered" this they quick
Perceived and took appropriate action, then
Hancock beheld what seemed defeat along
His entire front and swept with speed to hold
His line upon the Plank, contested there
By Hill and Field; his splendid presence filled
With martial force, infused his fading troops
With fire of his high courage, stabilized
The ebbing tide of war, just where he stood;
The Wilderness swift closing in did hide
His beacon, short-circuited electric force.
Quick council held and next the order flashed,
"Withdraw your troops and form along the Brock."

Longstreet by stroke of strategy and stealth,
Had smashed the Federal left and now to make
His victory complete upon that flank
He rode impressive with the front of mail
Leading his column down the war-worn Plank,
Resistless at that moment with his force,
Lean veterans, like scourge of rawhide made
For hand of Mars to lash and cut and drive.
Another evil hour bent close above
That army which had suffered oft before
Until its morale showed dim tarnished spots
Of lack of confidence in some who were
In high command. Let Longstreet but complete
His blow, the cause for which Grant fought might fail,
The nation's future balanced on that hour.
Then thru the corridors of dusky air
Above the field of battle moved the shape
Of her whom men call Fate, her slow glide stopped—,
The face high featured, dusk, impassive, raised
Above all hate and hope—stretched out her hand

And from long fingers formed of living bronze,
An alien influence wavered o'er the field,
Her work thus done Fate sought her realm again.
Behold Longstreet was riding close to Death
But not at Federal hands, within the brush
A line of men in gray, just off the road
Crouched waiting; with their vision strangely blurred
They saw emerge from shadow of the road
A group of mounted officers, then fired.
Two fell from off their horses dead as stone,
The giant Longstreet toppled, then was caught
And laid beside the road and from his chest
Deep torn gushed out the blood, a motion made
To press attack, that now had lost its force,
Unconscious lapsed, and taken from the field;
'Twas thus that Stonewall Jackson wounded fell
By blinded volley of his troops who fired
When first they saw his figure thru the mist.
(Expert these fellows picking off their own)

Thus Lee, by Fate was robbed of his right arm,
His chief lieutenant carried from the field;
To make ill fortune's bag of game complete,
Two able generals carelessly were thrust
In its capacious canvas stained with blood.
Longstreet's attack had lost its carrying power;
All action was postponed till four o'clock,
Thus glowing victory changed to grim intent.
Fate's work was finished throned apart in dusk
Her presence far removed, from God's, across
Her sombre pallor passed a shadowy smile.
Behind his breastworks Hancock seemed to sense
The change and ordered out Lesure's brigade
To sweep along the front from left to right
His flank to be one hundred yards removed
From Hancock's lines entrenched along the Brock.
This manœuvre was performed as on parade;
The rebs encountered, dived forthwith to depths

Of their own forest, Lee reformed his line,
His right anchored unto the railroad bed.
Now Hancock having cleared his own front yard,
Prepared to visit Lee's to stir a muss,
Lee beat him to the punch as will be seen.
The morning's work is done, our practiced hand
Turns to the afternoon; register three
Hot points of time, the hours of Two and Four
And Six, arithmetical progression framed
To suit the mystic method of this day,
So filled with happy augeries of doom
And dim dimensions, Two, increasing Four
Are points that spear the wing already torn
And shattered; but before the hour of six,
We take a change of venue from the left
Far to the Federal right,—refreshing change,
New characters and tinged with salient salt;
And here unfolds ironic drama touched
With suspicion and suspense, so unlike
In tone to the deep tragedy that marked
The union left, black bruised in weltering blood.
But now I turn the combination knob
To Two, the door of narration opens wide,

Wilcox and Potter troops of Burnside's corps
Make their debut, on left-center, this ground
Between the Plank and Pike, where Crawford was,
Where Wadsworth had been caught in previous fights,
Attacking here the veteran troops of Heth,
Perry's Floridians; somehow these last
Appear to leave a milder taste in war's
Deep grooved mouth than the roll of other names,
Virginians, keen as salt, the pepper black
Of Carolinians, Georgians, last of all
Fire-eating Texans but Floridians, huh!
The confederates were entrenched above a rough
Ravine, with usual brush—had helpful guns,
My opinion, if the fight was waged in tops
Of trees, the rebs alert, would have ensconced
Them there—, the struggle wavered back and forth
And at its close the lines stood as they were
At the beginning; this the formula

For all that fight, the struggle back and
forth,
And then the lines were stabilized behind
Entrenchments, thus the whole terrain was
marked
On either side by breastworks hewed and
dug
In haste or fortified at leisure; now
Draws near the proper time to hear the
plea,
Of counsel for Burnside, why he delayed
To take his place, in battle at the time
Appointed; hear the plea, "The march was
long,"
Yet so was Longstreet equal too in length,
"But half of Burnside's corps were raw
recruits
And weighted down with unaccustomed
packs,"
But war demands of all, endurance firm
Of the unendurable, performance due
Of the impossible, but mark this fact
That Potter's raw unpolished troops, when
chance
Was given, fought in better form, than
troops
Of Mott, though veteran, for much depends,

Upon the spirit of the one who leads,
But picture Burnside, at easy lunch
Whilst death engorged itself upon the field,
And men who fought since early morning hours
Were panting in defeat behind the wall
Of long entrenchments up and down the Brock—
A crisis, this to change a man of lead,
To stabbing steel, but some seem made of sand,
Mere weight and size, that ne'er can fuse with shock
Of communicable fire; he had his day,
Of honor not deserved, let's speak the truth,
He meant no harm, a patriot at heart,
But war appears a day of judgment set
Far ahead whose consuming fire destroys,
Save tempered steel of character and mind,
E'en on that metal leaves a tarnished hue
From fires of hell; the second point of time
The hour of four approaches where was drawn
To one fierce vortex all war's winds of wrath.
Lee wrought his thunderbolt thru measured hours,

From Longstreet's fall to this decisive time,
And crammed with high explosive, if they had
Agreed those two—, Longstreet and Lee, and fired
A double-barreled offensive, it would
Have torn great holes within the foes' defense,
But Longstreet obstinate would fire too late,
Lee of larger nature would take the blame.
There was no surprise, Lee's attack was hurled
Savagely against the line of Hancock's, where
Entrenched along the Brock, to front and rear.
Two full divisions swept to the assault,
Names not unfamiliar, Anderson and Field,
At one hundred paces from the wooden walls
Along the Brock, they halted their advance
With one long rattling fire of leveling lead.
In cover of the smoke, they rushed against
The force of flame that thrust and spurted forth
Thru heavy haze of sulphur, thus repelled
Volleyed with ragged hate, then forward rushed,

The barrier of resinous logs caught fire,
The smoke and heat then drove the Federals back,
With frenzied yells the confederates swept
The long entrenchment; thru the thickened air
Of battle stood high poised on topmost log,
A figure gaunt, taut held his banner staff,
High glowed the flag cross barred with stars, and seemed
Alive; before the southern charge and surge
Of fury broke the troops of Mott's command,
Ward's brigade crumbled, both sought safety past
The second line, but here the great attack
Stubbed toe and stumbled on a stubborn root,
Dow's battery, sixth Maine, refused to budge
Buttressed the second line with all their weight,
Their guns in rhythmic fury, leaped, recoiled,
Then leaped again, thru smoke they pounded back
The whelming pressure of the furious foe,
The forest caught afire; though ringed with flame,

The gunners faltered not, their courage glowed.
In high vibrations such as overpowered
The coarse red color made of common flame,
And hurled repeating crash on crash to stem,
The rebel rush, point blank they bowled it out.
You glimpsed at times, thru smoke, half naked forms
Of men within a living furnace, scorched,
With courage hotter than the fire, repelled
Attacks, each motion counted as they rammed
And fired with timing force and powerful swing
Of blackened bodies, this the breed of men
Who drove the Yankees clippers in old days
Around the Horn, and cut the masts that swayed
Pointing with slender tips at alien stars,
Sinewy in type, lean, brutal, unafraid.
Likewise at crossing of the Plank and Brock,
Another section of this battery fought,
Plugged back the rebel rush, hats off to Dow,

To his brass guns and to his fighting men.
These twain did form the bridge-heads of defense
Against the cresting flood, that swept the dam.
Come on! you infantry, the guns cannot
Fight it upon their own forever. Sprang
Carroll's brigade from out the second line,
Swept thru the drift of beaten units, steel
Low leveled, straight for that bitter ground,
Between the trenches; clash, on clash, there rears
A rising wave, that mounted with a roar
Like meeting of two great seas, held, then heaved
One moment in tense balance, next beyond
The dyke, toppled the invading waves, then broke,
Confused in graying masses ebbed away;
For a brief time only the Confederates clung
Like leeches to the outer side of what
They just had won, then threatened on their flank
By Birney's troops retreated slowly, turned
And fired at will, until at last they merged
Into the jungle from whose depths had rushed

One hour or less: 'twas five the work was done
Upon the left, full measure then some more.
Soon to their ears there came the sound of guns,
Of furious fighting on the furthest right
Smoke of a new conflagration rolled
To dim the sunset as the morn was dimmed.
"By Gosh" declared a stalwart son of Maine,
Of Dow's battery "them Johnnies ain't all dead.
Old Sedg be calling for the sixth of Maine
To quiet 'em," "Oh to hell with you short tail,"
Growled out a soldier as he passed Dow's sixth,
"Us fellows up in front is all that keeps
Them Johnnies from toting off your guns
And turning them to fire the other way."
"I didn't see you fellers out in front
A half hour back," replied the gunner, "fact
You was heading for home, or thereabouts."
So chaffed these friendly enemies. Now turn
With me and trace the cause, and watch the course

Of battle far upon the union right,
Past Wilderness Tavern and here we change
Our Base of conflict from the brutal Brock,
So long accustomed, to Germanna Road
That runs south from the Ford that bears its name,
The feeder of the fight by which the troops
Were marched, now the Orange Court House Turnpike
Takes precedence of its poor brother, called
The Orange Court House Plank, and to these twain
I give their full baptismal names, this once,
In place of Hub and Bub of battle brew.
The final action of this blasted day,
Has different pitch, and varied motive tone,
Much lighter and more swift than marks the black
And brutal, struggles of the Plank and Brock
To which I say farewell with lightened heart.
Suspense is here, the action too is framed
In psychological elements, touched
With grimest humor, characters are changed
In this fifth act, a different stage; in place

Of Hancock, Birney and their aides, salute
John Sedgwick, Wright and with a different
note,
Shaler and Seymour who achieved some
fame.
And on the southern side we page instead
Of Longstreet, Hill and Heth, these stalwart
names,
Ewell, old Jubal Early and his vis—
A-vis young John B. Gordon, Brigadier,
A group of characters, with tang of salt,
Straight lines, odd angles and Spencerian
curves.
No Shakespeare hath arisen, none will rise
To give them portraiture, the more the pity,
Americans derived from English stock,
strength joined
With quaintness formed by pressure of a
new,
A strange environment, the richest field
Of human history gone to oblivion;
The southern race who fought the Civil War
Was eaten of it and its bones are dust,
In scant and scattered records of that time
Both north and south between the strata
formed
Of many volumes, portions of the frame

And skeletons of giants that is all.
Yet mind should cover being and events,
No boy who died, forgotten, half consumed
By fire and all consumed by teeth of time
In that dread battle of the fifth and sixth,
Should go without remembrance thru the word
Once written; when we too shall fail and fall
Apparently forgotten, back of us must brood
The minds of those who follow, on our fate,
Relate our efforts to the finished whole,
And deck our desolation with the rose
Of Life's eternal beauty, flutter Muse
To earth and take the mortal way of power
And pain, of humor that is salt unto
Our feast and savor to our famine, now
We come to those who closed the day; salute
John Sedgwick, type and strong embodiment
Of the old army, in his day pursued
The Indians of the plains, as Lieutenant fought
Throughout remote campaigns of wonder, blazed
With names of Vera Cruz, Chapultepec

And Monterey, there General Winfield Scott
Full orbed in size, ability and fame,
Took luster from the war of 1812.
Taylor and Worth, the latter's shaft that stands
Archaic past the pre-Homeric days;
The war that sprouted captains, aye and slim
Lieutenants, all these grew to Generals large
Within our Civil War, let's call the roll,
Listen, Lee and Grant, Jackson and Sherman, Meade
Paired with Longstreet, Jubal Early linked
With Sedgwick, classmates at West Point, alas
Comrades once, now together close they meet
But at a different angle, bitter black
That feud, but my imagination draws
In midway flight to those Elysian fields
Where Heroes dwell withdrawn yet not remote,
They hear this narrative of mine in moods
Befitting; wireless? Oh no, more subtle ways
Than that, for use of spirits yet beware

The Bunk,—Lee listens gravely, once his eye
Flashed fire, then milder grew, no comment made;
Grant scarcely said a word, but nodded once,
As Rawlins by his side, excited drew
A map upon his palm, and dented deep
With an emphatic finger where two lines
As highways crossed, a glint appeared in Grant's
Eyes, "Rawlins better put it up to Lee
He knows," the other heroes were less calm;
Sheridan moved with fuming steps along
The flashing shore, then seized and mounted quick
Achilles' charger, galloped off before the Greek
Could catch his august breath, and Burnside swelled
In anger till John Sedgwick soothed him with
A tale of humor, Early stood aloof
In scorn, a Yankee and a civilian, write
About the war! one question asked a bright
Attendant, "Did this writer make comment
Upon his style of dress?" Thus reassured,

Grunted indifference as what else he said,
This little flight of Fancy now is winged.
Return we to reality to end
This bitter business that is nearly done.
To John Sedgwick, the army was his home.
As to a sailor seems his ship when left,
All else was alien, grizzled now with time,
Gross hardships, keenly wrinkled round the eyes,
Steadfast and skillful in his harsh trade of war,
His life and interest centered in his corps,
The Sixth, the men his children whom he held
In strict but kind regard, a type you find
Sometimes within the army but most rare.
(General Smith another of this type
Initial W. F. who led fresh raw recruits,
At Donelson in one victorious charge,)
Sedgwick was doomed to fall some days ahead
At Spottsylvania, pierced below the eye
By bullet from a skilled sharp-shooter's gun.
He took his chance with death as routine work
As the man of business goes to his desk,

The laborer or clerk, unto his task.
A Yankee born, but minus of their guile,
Without ambition bore his country's sword,
A simple, honest man, his loss struck home
Throughout the army, Grant and his Generals,
Stopped for one moment in full tide of war
To bow their heads in tribute to his worth,
For men of character are not replaced
Their loss is loss of vital blood, not skin
Abrasion, as the death of selfish men,
That hurts but for the moment then is cured.
John Sedgwick rests upon the burial slope
Of the New England Village, once his home.
Upon this day to be his last for work
In heat of battle, Sedgwick was below
The level of his usual competence
As were Hancock, and Sheridan and all
The Federal chiefs, the Confederates too
Were not themselves exempt as will transpire;
Men's energies subnormal 'neath the weight
And pressure of the Wilderness, and minds
Bewildered by its gloomy portents, saw
New, strange battalions form from moving mists.

Across from Sedgwick glowered that warrior grim
Old Jubal Early, like unto a tree
Half slanted by the winds of temper, gnarled
With ugly nodules, but still full of sap,
A bachelor but of the crabbed type
Whilst John Sedgwick was wedded to his work
And quietly genial; Early had but one
Devotion, this his mother and her needs,
Aside from her, his temper blew against
The world, his character is summed in this—,
He scorned allegiance to the flag he fought,
Unreconstructed exile to the end.
The Muse of History places on his tomb
Her tribute with a half ironic smile,
Yet touched, with tenderness for the man's stark
Honesty of nature,—now whose portrait next?
Young General Gordon, Georgia's gifted son
Embodiment of the flamboyant South,
High eloquence with classic bombast filled,
No humor, pendant beard and narrow face.
Sound pallor, high forehead, and motive hair

Brushed smoothly back, unruffled by the stress
Of thought, but fight? His every fibre thrilled
To battle, here he flashed the sword of Ney
His bellying bombast gone like vacant air
All faculties were focussed on attack,
Alert and keen to see and quick to strike
Sardonic contrast showed between this Youth
And his commander, at his near approach
You could observe old Early bristle, "What
This upstart lawyer full of gestures, words
To teach an old campaigner," so he growled;
Mark well there is no caste so strong as brands
Those trained in arts of war, this rooted pride
Is their life blood and source of energy,
Too oft it makes them rigid, now it chanced
Throughout this campaign two young Brigadiers
But not West Pointers showed unusual force
And true initiative, on either side
Gordon of Georgia, and young Nelson Miles.

There is a story worthy to be told
Concerning Gordon and his elder chief,
Implicit irony, in chuckling mirth.
Old Jubal sat his charger watching grim
His army crossing at a ford in haste
When came a sight that caused his eyes to bulge
"By God! What's that?" his coruscated fire
Of language made the ambient air to crisp;
It was enough to drive a milder man
To words, for there appeared splashing the ford
In midst of his mans' army, what a sight!
A woman's equipage and at the helm
A negro coachman, there a lady sat;
Thru the old warrior's nature went a shock
Of double voltage, for he was two things,—
A soldier, and a bachelor at heart,
This shock communicated all around,
His staff stood withered and the passing troops
Grinned their appreciation, Early saw them not,
His outraged eyes beheld one object that
A lady's caravan amid his troops,
It was too much, he said it was, out loud
And apoplexy sought him for its own,

Just then an aide drew near saluted, said
"Sir, it's Mrs. Gordon's carriage," at these words
The General gulped three times, then rode to meet
The lady, sweeping off his hat he bowed
Old fashioned courtesy, in act and words;
Crabbed he was and odd, but it is plain
To you the man's real nature, not so shines
On such occasion, Hooker, Sheridan,
Nor Sherman, only Grant and George G. Meade
Would have been equal each in his own way
To such emergency; the interlude
Is done, we now observe the final act,
A paler replica of what was staged
Upon the other flank, same in outline,—
Assaults, repulses, death and little else
For either side; the southern cannon placed
In balance, note the group at Widow Tapp's,
And at the other end in open ground
Near Spottswood's thence to sweep Germanna Road;
By strange coincidence, forwith appears
To even matters, Fear's obsessions

Riding the southern mind, remember once
'Twas Hancock held from free advance by threat
Of absent Pickett, next of Longstreet's corps,
Early was paralyzed that day by fear
Of bruising Burnside roaring for the fray,
Crushing the center with his powerful corps,
But as it chanced Ambrose entertained no
Such thought, a roaring lion? au contraire
The speed and spirit of a browsing ox,
Yet Early was enthralled of what indeed
Was but a bugaboo, just like a round
Fierce dentured pumpkin flushed with candle light;
But Gordon who had fought, about the time
Of noon, a fierce engagement in the brush
East of the Orange Turnpike, was on edge
To make a dash against the Federal right,
But surly Early waxed more obdurate
Against the scarce concealed impatience shown
By his young Lieutenant; like a mule in sand
Ears back, refused to budge because he feared
Burnside's attack, indeed it should have come,

Restless, unappeased, Gordon scouted far
Around the Union line and found that flank
In air, not picketed and unentrenched,
No wonder, Gordon born a fighter, felt
A tremor and the fervor of the chase
As does a tiger crouched and taut to spring
Upon his guileless prey; Gordon proclaimed
In later life this chance beyond its worth,
"Mayhap" and "Might have been," magic genii
Small at first, swell the world with substance formed
Of vast hypothesis; at least his plan
In part was realized; mark towards the close
Of afternoon, a mounted group crashed through
The central jungle, westward from the Plank
Towards the Turnpike, freed at length from clutch
Of its detaining waves, their horses leaped
In thundering rhythm down the dust spurned road,
Thru sun and shade that flickered as they swept,
To waken battle where it long had slept,

Upon the left of the Confederate line.
There was no mistaking, he who rode ahead
On the great chestnut gray, with iron mixed
And mane curved back upon the wind of speed,
The splendid head, the beard with silver sheen;
In the close velvet collar of the coat
On either side, three stars of ranking gold,
The power and glow of war surrounded him
As on he rode, then reined his charger with
Ungentle hand, before Headquarter's tent,
Ewell and Early, rose, saluted, Lee
Held them in gaze of high Olympian wrath
That caused these veterans stern and harsh,
To dwindle with the look of truant boys.
Lee's anger never crackled with the leap
Of flame but swept with silent surge that left
A width of barren blackness where his wrath
Had burned, gentle in strength and patient, yet
When roused for cause, his men of might afraid
Of nothing, feared his moods of burning wrath.

His words were simple but his gaze was not,
It seemed to hold their failure up to scorn
Of final judgment, "Gentlemen, can you do
Nothing here to relieve the pressure on
My right?" Now was Gordon's opportunity
His duty to declare before his chief,
(His superiors itched to clutch him by the throat)
The splendid chance that seared his hand to use.
Lee heard, and gave the order for attack,
And thru his voice and eyes unveiled there flowed
An urgency that burned with scathing force,
Made Ewell's indecision one unit
Of resolve, whilst Early's crabbed stubborn will
Was for the moment changed to fluent force,
To set again in rigid mold as soon
As pressure of his master's mind was gone.
But Lee had spoken, thus was Gordon loosed,
And with peculiar swiftness two brigades
Gordon's and Johnson's were in motion, 'twas
Close to the hour of six, the measured sun

Was level in the west prepared to call
"Time" on this bloody battle, see the dusk
Already changed to gloom in sullen depths
Of the black Wilderness, where was thick smoke,
Tramped brush, torn cartridges and dark trails of blood;
Where there should have been naught but nature green,
Were blackened stumps of what were once the forms
Of men, and others stretched, both blue and gray,
Mere boys, in death's contorted horror, left
To carrion birds and furtive forest rats,
God grant this form of madness soon shall pass
Clean off the earth, who can this riddle read.
This carnival of blood and pain the sole
Great sacrifice that man hath ever made
For cause either than himself; here the male
Has suffered in his body to bring life
From blood he spills, as women groan in travail.
Close up 'tis not a pretty world, but hath

Its uses, so at least we've been informed.
This battle might now be compared unto
A log, that had burnt fiercely at one end
And now was smouldering black with not a spark,
And then the other end was seen to burst
In sudden flame fanned by the changing wind.
We see the silent men of Gordon's formed,
In a wide clearing near a stretch of woods,
Unto their ears attuned, not distant sounds
Within the forest, blows of axes clipped
Into the boles of trees and careless shouts;
The Union soldiers were all unaware
Of that lean crouching line about to spring
Upon them not prepared in mind or arms,
These men of Shaler's thought the day was done,
Not so did Gordon's, from his left there stretched
Johnson's brigade, right to the forest edge,
In his support, no time was wasted, there
Was none to waste, each minute of the day
Was weighted with the gold in reddish tinge
Of briefest opportunity, now came
A silent signal, those long lines of gray
Poised, plunged into the green bodied woods

As swimmers dive into the sea, so lost
To view for brief breath holding seconds, they
Emerged in clearing, thronged with Union troops,
Coatless and careless armed with axe and spade,
Building entrenchments, destined not to use,
Surprised, engulfed by hundreds, onward swept
The Confederates shoving to discard, a mass
Of prisoners, more, still more, past their advance,
Two Federal generals fell into their net,
That bellied with the weight of easy fish.
The far outreaching forces quick enveloped
The troops of Wright on flank and rear, and spread
A panic down the Germanna road that shook
Headquarters, where a courier cried that all
Was lost and Lee had won as was his wont,
This Grant met quietly, with a cold contempt,

A grating common sense that created
An atmosphere where hot and fuming fright
Was changed to coolness, just as iron drawn
From furnace hisses to steam when plunged
In water, panic quenched and disappeared
As vapor mixes, fades in cooler air,
With orders brief and curt Grant set a dam
Against the coming tide, if such it proved,
But dusk had thickened and the southern troops
Were disordered by their swift advance thru brush;
As they drew nearer the nerve centre, called
Headquarters, they received a shock of strong
Reaction, as the Federal troops drew taut,
Gordon withdrew to his established lines.
The battle called the Wilderness was done.

In symbol named the Battle of the Roads
That color took from fortunes of the fight;
The Turnpike formed of early promise, steeped
In hue of orange; moving from the fords
The Germanna road, the gray of service wears;

The Plank a crimson band through memories lit
In triumph flaming, twice for Blue and Gray;
The Brock empurpled with the gush of blood
From sides of stricken armies, so behold
The Wilderness for evermore a flame
With streaks of color, brilliant as a flag,
Glowing orange, thus typifying Hope,
Crimson of Victory, and perpetual hue,
Of purple for Remembrance.

EARTHQUAKE

A quiver not from outside shock, but deep
Within the vessel of our World in which
We sail on unchartered seas, then slow before
My sight in deep opacity was seen
A giant blind, inchoate, whose dread name
Was Earthquake; scarcely blocked inside our sphere
In which he stooped and seemed a vast earth thing,
Like to the phantasia of a Cubist's mind,
With sinews of long strata down the arms,
Back broader than a mountain's width of base,
Bent at right angles, face scarce featured, blank
As blindness, a head unhewed with frontlet formed
Of monolithic miles, measureless limbs
Embedded in the foundations of the earth.

The terror was that as an entity
This ancient giant might be made to live,
To charge in fury like the Rhino when,
It rushes from the jungle mad with rage.
Thus after slumberous ages dim and dumb
This primordial monster felt the touch
Of some strange stimuli, to depth on depth
Unto a grey, inchoate sense, he moved
A fraction, and great cities shook and men
Scuttled in fright; old Earthquake settled down
To his blank stone age blindness once again.
After a brief breath holding, the earth folk
Like busy ants were rushing here and yon
Puffed with a thousand lusts and petty prides,
And fattened with loose luxuries and the spoils
Of commerce: Marvelous appeared their works,
They drove long tunnels underneath the ground,—
One deep extended excavation touched
The giant's cuticle, tickling his shoulder vast,
Across the Cubist's face, the vagueness of
An idiot's grin, a mist of humor, then

A grayness gave his measureless blank
width
Of indeterminate face a faint approach from
stone
To animation, and his shoulders twitched
As does a horse's flank touched with a straw,
A slight reaction, but proud cities shook
To their deep foundations, from the doom
Foreshadowed fled the populace,—not hurt,
Chattered like frightened monkeys, soon
assured
They were immersed in evil ways again,
Blaspheming the patient Powers above who
wrought
And sacrificed to bring them good but met
With sneers and murderous hearts, and all the
while
Inciting with their deeds the forces blind
Within the earth and joining malice with
The Powers of Air who disobedience
wrought.
So Man did make his own destruction sure;
End of the cycle neared, the crisis gloomed,
Weird warnings flashed and showed abysmal
depths,
Unheeding, Man's insolence did fast increase,
In wild abandon sought his wilful ways,

Disdainful of what little good he once
Had learned, then evil overflowed, and seeped
Below, and black magnetic forces from
Low lusts of surging millions, keenly drawn
And stored for ages till the air of earth
Was overcharged and then vibrated down,
Far down, until it reached the solid bulk
Of him, the primordial one, and thereupon
His coldness turned to warmth, to heat, to rage,
Between great jagged teeth serrated like
Sharp crests of mountains, crazed he ground great rocks,
And smoke of brimstone filled the underworld;
Forth from his darkness vomited fierce flames
And gulping smoke, then far there shown the blaze
Of coned volcanoes, finally roused past rage
Unthinkable, a Frankenstein complete,
The strata muscles of his arms coalesced,
Slow heaved his shoulders, up the blocks of fists,
The head strained striving 'gainst grim pressure, jaws
Serrated, dripping lava thick as blood!
He surged and swayed, the surface of the earth

Rolled frightfully as though the solid ground
Were waves of water and the crust was split
As tissue; Then mine eyes appalled beheld
The Highest City topple to its doom,
Swaying, giddy, trembling, falling, ruined,
Helpless in fury of this Thing undreamed;
A roar and crash continuous past the noise
Of earthly battles, then was shut from view
In shrouding smoke, dim dust most strangely lit,
With flames that flared and died, quick greenish glares.
For days uncounted all was hid in gloom,
Then from the North there blew a bitter wind
That swept where heat and death had wrought obscured
In darkness, even then the air was dun
As though our orb were muffled close in grey
Of deepest mourning, then mine eyes beheld
A jumbled mass of mountains, hills and plains,
Sharp broken granite, myriad rising hills
In surging grey, to lesser levels ebb;
Athwart this heaped up desolation ran
A higher ridge, that formed the grave of some
Great Thoroughfare; far down the island rose

Within the sombre sky, a skeleton
Embodying once a city, dedicate
To rites of Mammon, now its monument,
From perilous heights there flapped a girder like
A broken limb, and through its forest red
Of structural iron swept an alien wind,
Shrilling in mockery or moaned attuned
Unto a requiem strange, and over all
A silence such as man hath never known,
The silence of a grave outstretched for miles,
A sky for shroud, grey, dank as cerement cloth,
An air whose pallor gave no hope of warmth.
Not here alone was ruin, for round Rome
Had vanished and the waves rolled o'er the hills
Once dominating, now forever hid;
Paris was leveled with her plain and scarce
Discernible; London forever lost
Within its dusk, and now made permanent.

Man wrought creation then enhanced its doom
His walls and turrets down in dust dissolve,
And souls to Satan, sifting down as chaff.

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